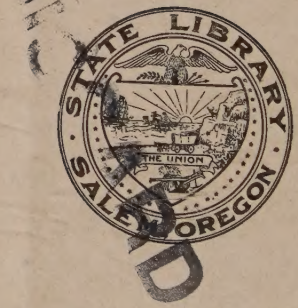
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MORALS FOR MODERNS

BY ELMER DAVIS

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CONTENTS

	Page
Bachelor Girl	11
Free Soil	42
Amateur	72
Ungracious Lady	106
Count No Man Happy	134
Cold Sunlight	165
Sharpshooter	190
Handy Man	215
Bride of Quietness	243
Jealous Mistress	273
Locksmiths Laugh at Love	302

Modern man has been set free, but we begin to realize that with a great price obtained we this freedom. We reject, because it no longer fits the life we live, the moral code of our ancestors, and the supernatural authority that gave it sanction. But without some rules of behavior, life becomes unlivable. We are beginning to sketch a code of modern ethics, suited to the world as we see it—a code which may not be so very different from the old one, except as it will be more tolerant and more elastic, conceding that circumstances alter cases, that one man's meat may be another man's poison.

The thing can be done, the thing must be done; but the doing will not be easy. It is pioneer work, exploring of unknown ground, dangerous work, like all pioneering. Some day we shall reach the goal, but there will be a heavy casualty list; and your name or mine may be written on it.—*Victor Compton,* ETHICS OF TOMORROW.

BACHELOR GIRL

FIVE o'clock. The office resounded with the slam of closing desks, the patter of receding footfalls, gusts of eager voices cut off by the bang of a door. The day's grind was over. In the railed enclosure outside the boss's office Eunice Pryor locked her typewriter desk; but she couldn't leave till he let her go, and behind his closed door he had been in conference with a caller for the past hour. Besides—that phone call she had been waiting for all day—— She stared out at the midtown sky-line—huge gold-spangled masses, black-gray against the ocher afterglow. It didn't look like New York, it looked like an artist's ideal of New York; everything sharp, clean-cut; no fuzzy edges. If only the things one had to do were so starkly clear——!

On the desk, her telephone purred softly. She snatched it up, one shaky hand groping for the switch that cut off the extension in the inner office. Reassured, she answered; and a moment later her taut body relaxed.

"Oh! Hello, Roger. What brings you to town? . . . Me? I don't believe you, but it's sweet of you to say so. . . . I see; two birds with one stone. . . . Of course, Roger. I understand. . . . To-night?

Oh—— Why, surely, Roger, if it's your only evening in town. . . . Anything you like; I haven't seen a show this fall. . . . No, you'd better come to the apartment; I'll have to dress, and mother will want to see you. . . . But of course, my dear; I'm crazy to see you. Don't be silly. . . . Yes indeed. Good-by."

Her hands were still shaking as she put down the telephone. If he called to-night, while she was out—— But he never called her at the apartment; he'd have called before this, if he were in town at all. . . . The buzzer on the desk summoned her to the inner office, where the boss and his caller sat wreathed in cigar smoke.

"No need for you to stick around any longer, Miss Pryor," said the boss amiably. Then—"Oh, wait a minute. Has Valentine reported in yet?"

"Not yet, Mr. Hannegan."

"Huh! And he's three days overdue. He needn't think he can——"

"I had a note from him last week," said Eunice. "When he was in Pittsburgh. He said he might stop off at Elmira and try to sell Sibley."

"Sibley? It'll take a better man than Mr. Lindley Valentine to sell that hard-boiled old catawampus. . . . No, why I asked you, Miss Pryor—Barclay swears that he saw Valentine on Times Square last night."

She looks a little pale about the gills, thought the boss's caller.

"I know, Mr. Hannegan. Mr. Barclay told me. I

guess he told everybody. But it's easy to be mistaken in a Times Square crowd. If Valentine were back he'd have reported to-day."

"If he could. But—— Do you know if he's a drinking man, Miss Pryor?"

"Why, I suppose he takes a drink now and then. I never heard of anything more. . . . Not that I'd be likely to know, of course."

"I guess there's not much goes on around this office that you don't know," Mr. Hannegan chuckled. "Where does Valentine live? Somewhere out on Long Island, don't he?"

"Rockville Center, I believe."

"Well, how about calling up his wife and asking her——"

"I wouldn't do that, Mr. Hannegan. If he'd gone home, she'd see that he reported."

"Unless he came home drunk, in no shape to report."

"She'd hardly tell us, if he did. She has to live on his salary."

"Uh!" said Mr. Hannegan. "Well, I'll give him another day. But I don't like the way that fellow acts. Seems to think he's too good for his job. He comes near not bein' good enough, if he only knew it. He needn't think he can take a vacation here in town on expense money. If he don't show up to-morrow—— Well, I guess that's all, Miss Pryor. Good night."

"Good night," said Eunice, and the boss's caller felt included in her smile of farewell.

"Damned competent-looking girl," he observed. "Pretty, too. . . . This Valentine you were speaking of—— Friend of hers?"

"Hell, no. All the salesmen sort of lean on her, but he's not in her class at all. She's a very high-grade type of woman, that Miss Pryor. College graduate, and all that. Don't know what I'd do without her."

"You'd better figure out. Some day she'll marry and leave you."

"Not her. She supports her mother; whoever marries her marries two. The boys she knows can't afford that, and by the time they can, they'll all be married to somebody else. No, she'll stick."

"Yes," the caller mused, "we all stick if we have to."

"Well, you needn't be sorry for her. She gets sixty a week; and I don't know anybody can have as good a time in New York as a bachelor girl on a good salary, with somebody always takin' her out to dinner and nothing to worry about but the length of skirts. It beats bein' married. Ask your wife if it don't."

II

New York has two Ghettos—the one you read about on the lower East Side, where bearded rabbis pore over Hebrew texts, and bright-eyed boys start up the ladder that leads to Park Avenue apartments and Hollywood palaces; and the Nordic Ghetto seven miles farther uptown, between Columbia University and Morningside Park.

You don't read much about that one. It lacks the East Side's squalor, and its romance. Morningside is a colony of immigrants, too—but native-born Protestant immigrants from west of the Hudson, people like everybody else. Graduate students and instructors in the university live there, and professors who lacked the foresight to marry rich; business and professional men who can afford to send their children to Morningside schools, but can't afford a car and a chauffeur to take them there from residences nearer the office. Solid, serious, settled people with a job to do, who live comfortably but have no margin for extravagance, financial or emotional. And especially widows. Widows who live by renting rooms, widows who keep tea rooms or gift shops, widows who live with bachelor sons; above all, ubiquitously, widows who live with bachelor daughters. Such as Mrs. Pryor.

When her husband died, in the corn-belt town where she had lived all her life, she wondered why God had not taken her too; and then realized that she had been spared for her daughter's sake. So when Eunice wanted to try her luck in New York, Mrs. Pryor uprooted herself and went along. She was in mortal terror of the city; but the life insurance had been just enough to carry Eunice through the state university and a secretarial school. She had to go where Eunice went, now.

They rented a room, with kitchen privilege, from Mrs. Cheeves, who lived by renting rooms in her apartment off Amsterdam Avenue. The miracles of domestic economy that Mrs. Pryor performed, in that

first year when Eunice was making eighteen dollars a week, can be appreciated by none but housekeepers removed from rural plenty to urban exiguity. But they lived, and kept their health; Eunice got on at the office. Now, four years later, behold Mrs. Pryor transplanted—alert, bright-eyed, looking ten years younger despite her gray hair, and happy as she had never been before.

She might not have admitted that, in deference to her husband's memory; Lincoln Pryor had been a good man. But any man, Mrs. Pryor felt, was something of a trial. Besides, in her home town she had had a position in the community, and civic responsibilities; in New York she was responsible for nobody but herself. Eunice, of course—but Eunice was no responsibility now; she had grown up into an understanding comrade, between her and her mother there was a perfect sympathy such as Mrs. Pryor had never quite attained with any one, back home.

Mrs. Pryor had her own apartment now—ground floor rear, but a home of her own; she had friends; above all, she had New York. The New York that people write about she never saw; but in the New York that escapes the movies and the front page she was having the time of her life. She who had gone to church twice every Sunday back home went once a year, in Manhattan; but she went once a week to evening lectures at the university, once a month she sat in the gallery at the opera or the Philharmonic, she knew the museums and the libraries. She still thought of herself as a small-town woman, but she would have

died of suffocation if she had had to go back to a small town.

But the crown of this unexpected Indian-summer happiness was Eunice. Mrs. Pryor's friends had dutiful and competent daughters; but most of them were older than Eunice, they taught school, they were beginning to have the prim, pinched, blind-alley look of old maids. . . . And at this point Mrs. Pryor's musings always halted, on the brink of an unplumbed abyss. Of course Eunice must marry some day—have her own home, and children; and of course (though this seemed rather a pity) a husband. When that time came, her mother would never stand between her and happiness; but—— Not yet. Eunice was twenty-six; she need be in no hurry to plunge into those complex uncertainties. Some day, when she had a family of her own, she would remember and appreciate the cool serenity of this Eden of women, which no Adam had yet disturbed.

So her message that Roger was taking her out to dinner had set Mrs. Pryor quivering with an inadmissible terror. She had forgotten Roger.

But she was bright and smiling as she rang Mrs. Cheeves's bell.

"Oh, Mrs. Cheeves, I wonder if you'd come down to dinner with me. Just after I came home with the chops and peas Eunice telephoned that she was dining out, with a young man. Unless you've got something on the stove——"

Mrs. Pryor knew, Mrs. Cheeves knew that she knew, that the double room, rear, was still unrented;

and that Mrs. Cheeves, deprived of that margin of income, dined usually on crackers and milk. But there is an etiquette, on the ragged edge.

"Why, yes, Mrs. Pryor, I'd love to. . . . Is this some one who's paying Eunice attention?"

Mrs. Pryor knew that was solicitude, not inquisitiveness.

"Oh, no indeed. Just a young man we used to know when he was getting his Ph. D. at the university. He's teaching now, at Ann Arbor."

"That's a long way to come to see a girl."

"Oh, he didn't come just for that. He had to consult some documents in the Columbia library. . . . Well, I must be getting back home——"

"I'll walk with you to the elevator," said Mrs. Cheeves. And when the apartment door had closed behind them—— "Oh, Mrs. Pryor, I'm so worried! About the girl who has my front room. She's a student in the School of Business. There's a young man who calls on her, and of course she has no place to receive him but her room. They all do that; but he stays so late—— And when I spoke to her about it, she said he was her brother. Brother! He's a Jew and she isn't. And once I saw her just after he'd left, and she looked—— Well, she looked like a girl who has a lover. You know what I mean. A lover."

Mrs. Pryor's horror was overmastered by curiosity.

"What does a girl who has a lover look like? I've never known one."

"She looked happy—and as if she knew she had no right to be happy. . . . Oh, I'm positive! A thing like

that going on in my apartment—— It makes me feel that I'm condoning immorality!" Mrs. Pryor clucked sympathetically. "And yet," said Mrs. Cheeves, "if I asked her to give up her room I might not be able to rent it again this semester. And with the rear double empty already——"

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Pryor. "What a terrible problem! . . . Have any of your other roomers noticed anything?"

"They haven't spoken of it. At least not to me."

"Then I shouldn't jump at conclusions. You wouldn't want to be unjust. After all, you don't really know——"

"No, I don't really know. But if I could find somebody else for that room—— Never rent rooms!" said Mrs. Cheeves bitterly. "I'd rather scrub!"

Mrs. Pryor shuddered in sympathy, and could not still her shuddering till she was safe again in the shelter her daughter had won for her. She had always said that when Eunice married, she would support herself by renting rooms.

III

The young man who sat in Mrs. Pryor's living-room admired Mrs. Pryor; he had grateful memories of the home dinners to which she had sometimes invited him when he was a penniless graduate student; but he found it hard to listen to her attentively, even though she was talking about Eunice, when his ears could follow the brisk movements of Eunice herself,

in her bedroom. Dressing for him, after two years of separation.

"You don't know what a joy it is," Mrs. Pryor was saying, "to see your baby grow up into your best friend. Eunice has made me stay young with her; we live like two sisters, in this lovely home she's made for me."

"You made it," Eunice called from the bedroom. "She takes good care of me, Roger. No wife could do better."

She came in, festive in a coral dinner gown—marked down at the end of last season, but what of that? Smiling, she gave him her hands.

"Lovely to see you, Roger. Where are we going? . . . *Street Scene?* Oh, I've wanted to see that. Only I hope you got balcony seats. I won't have you squandering your money."

"This is a celebration," said Roger. His hands shook as he held her coat. "You'll permit me a celebration, won't you, after two years?"

"I might. . . . Good-by, mother. I won't be late; Roger has to catch a midnight train at a Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. Don't run wild, you and Mrs. Cheeves."

Mrs. Pryor's bright smile vanished as the door closed on them. The way Roger looked at Eunice made her feel, all at once, old. . . .

In the corridor, he looked that way at Eunice again.

"Glad to see me?" he asked huskily.

"Of course."

He bent over her; she lifted acquiescent lips. . . . Good old Roger. . . . They drew apart; he snatched her back, held her tight, kissed her again, hungrily.

"Roger!" she gasped. "Somebody might see us!"

"What if they do? Lord, Eunice! To be with you again——"

But he let her lead him out, her hand in his arm. At the curb he hailed a taxi. She'd have preferred the subway; but no use squabbling on his only evening in town. She wouldn't mind his making love to her, anyway, if only he weren't so desperately serious about it. To-night she rather needed somebody to make love to her gently, soothingly. . . . In the taxi she leaned against his shoulder, silent, relaxed, till he kissed her again—quite too hard. She sat up.

"Give me a cigarette, Roger." He complied sulkily.

"Can't you smoke at home, even yet?"

"Oh, yes. Mother's outgrown some of her prejudices. But I can't at the office; and I didn't have time after I got home to-night. Had to dress up for you." Her smile caressed him. "Where are we going for dinner?" she asked. "I won't let you take me to any wild expensive place."

"I don't know much about New York restaurants. But I've heard there are lots of quiet places where you can get pretty good food, and something to drink with it. I suppose you know where they are."

"I? But, Roger, you know I hardly ever take a drink." (She needed one to-night, at that.)

"But surely you must know a few of these places——"

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"I do know one——" said Eunice, and could have bitten out her tongue.

Not there; not to-night; not with another man. If he were in town he'd be there. . . . But he wouldn't have been in town twenty-four hours without calling her up. Barclay must have been mistaken. Easy to be mistaken in a Times Square crowd. Everybody knew Barclay had it in for him, anyway. . . .

She became aware that Roger had asked her two or three questions that she hadn't even heard.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I was just trying to remember whether this place was on Forty-eighth Street or Forty-ninth."

. . . A man peered at them through a grilled door, and unlocked it when he recognized Eunice.

"Hello, Armand!" she said cheerily. "Roger, wait for me at the cloak-room—down there at the end of the corridor. I've got to write your name in the book." Then, when he was out of earshot—"Armand! Mr. Valentine isn't up-stairs, is he? Lin Valentine?"

"No, madame. I have not seen him since last night."

Last night. . . . Barclay was right, then. . . . Twenty-four hours, without calling her——

"Was he alone, Armand?" She hated herself for asking—like a wife. All the same, she felt a surge of relief when Armand nodded. . . . But why had he wanted to be alone? "How long did he stay, Armand? . . . Till you closed? Oh, dear. . . . Armand, was he—— Had he taken too much?"

But Armand's reproving frown intimated that his

patrons never took too much; and down the corridor, Roger was beginning to look impatient.

"Coming!" she called. "Armand, if he comes in while I'm here, send word to me. Say it's a phone call. Will you be sure to remember?"

Smiling, at ease, she returned to Roger. In a booth up-stairs, just big enough for two, a Martini blunted the sharp edge of worry. They ordered dinner.

"And now," she said, "tell me all you've been doing."

But try as she would, she couldn't keep her mind on the bright beginnings of Roger's academic career. Lin had been in town twenty-four hours, and he hadn't called her. He'd spent a whole evening in a speak-easy, alone. He hadn't been drunk for months, that she knew of; but——

"Excuse me," she broke into Roger's monologue. "I think I'll powder my nose."

Her sharp heels clattered down the stairs; she demanded pencil and paper from Armand; she wrote:

Lin—

I'm dining up-stairs with a boy I used to know. Going on to the theater. Don't try to see me. Barclay saw you last night in Times Square. Think up an alibi—a good one. Hannegan is going to fire you if you don't report to-morrow and square yourself. If you're all right when you get this, go home and come back to the office at nine A. M. sharp. If you're in bad shape, take a

Turkish bath or something. But you've got to be at the office in the morning and look all right.

E.

"There, Armand. Give him that when he comes in. Please remember; his job depends on it. So be sure not to forget, won't you?"

Now, perhaps, she could give her attention to Roger —Roger who was spending more money on her than he could afford, and mustn't have his one evening spoiled. . . . She succeeded pretty well; over spaghetti and chicken salad, and ice cream, he talked in gusts of elation. Then, when they had come to coffee and cigarettes—

"So at last," he finished, "I can ask you to marry me."

"Oh, Roger. . . . You know I couldn't leave mother."

"Not ever? Eunice, she may live thirty years. You can't sacrifice your whole life to a—to a mother complex!"

"How could I leave her? There's no money but what I make. You make even less." (She'd remembered that much of his monologue.)

"It goes farther out there. . . . Eunice, we can make it; I've figured it out. She used to talk of taking a bigger apartment, renting rooms. We could send her something, even out of twenty-eight hundred a year; and you might get a part-time secretarial job, at first. I know we couldn't leave her alone very long, but when I finish this book I'm pretty sure of a promotion.

Thirty-five hundred a year; maybe four thousand. We'd be settled by then; we could bring her on to live with us."

"Too big a risk, Roger. If anything went wrong, anywhere——"

"Risk? Of course it's a risk! But we can't deal ourselves all the face cards; we've got to do the best we can with what we hold. You're not going to—to let yourself wither up, are you, just because you're afraid of risks?"

Suddenly she found herself taking it seriously. . . . Risk, of course; hard work, of course. But work that might build something, get you somewhere. Better than work that only kept things going, from day to day; better than risks that got you nowhere—worse than nowhere. . . . But——

"Roger dear, if I were crazy about you—— Please don't look like that!"

"You were in love with me two years ago—when I went away. You said so."

"Oh, I thought I was. We were too poor to think of marrying; it made things seem brighter, to feel that there was somebody—— I wrote you afterward that we mustn't take it too seriously."

"I know; but I always supposed—— Eunice! Is there somebody else?"

"I don't know. . . . Yes, there was; but—— I don't like him much."

"But when you think about him, your hand shakes so you can't light that cigarette. Better let me do it. There! . . . Well? Going to marry him?"

She shook her head.

"Why not?" he probed.

"He hasn't any money." (That was true enough, so far as it went.)

"Oh, damn! . . . For two years I've lived and worked just for this—to see you, talk to you, tell you I love you——"

"Roger, that's not true! Mostly you work because you love your work. I won't have you think you're dependent on me! I hate people who always have to lean on somebody! . . . I like you better in some ways than any man I know—any man. This is our only evening together. Let's think how nice it is to be with each other, instead of making ourselves miserable."

"Yes. . . . I guess you're right. . . . Well, let's go see that show."

He was trying gallantly, but she foresaw that the evening was going to be rather ghastly. . . . At the door, Armand shook his head. Not yet.

IV

Ghastly was no word for it, thought Eunice three hours later. Why had they chosen to see a tragedy—poverty and frustration, jealousy and murder—on an evening when forty Marx Brothers couldn't have cheered them up? They rode home on the subway, without a word; at the door she kissed him good-by, in a rush of pity and affection—and tasted a salty trickle on his cheek. Crying! He made her sick. . . .

Still, if a man felt that way he might better cry unashamed than go off alone and get drunk. . . . She let herself into the dark apartment. From her mother's bedroom came a cheerful—

"Well, dear—did you have a nice evening?"

Eunice paused at the open door.

"All but the show. . . . I don't see why people think they have to write about things like that."

"Sex?" Mrs. Pryor assumed. "Yes, there seems to be a great deal of that on the stage nowadays. . . . Is Roger coming back soon?"

Her voice was casual, but Eunice knew what terror lay behind it.

"I don't think so. All his interests are out there, now."

"Oh! . . . Well, good night, dear. . . . Oh, by the way—some one telephoned you about an hour ago. Some man. He didn't leave his name."

Eunice was grateful for the darkness—grateful, too, that her mother didn't know Lin's voice. (She had never met him, had heard of him only as one of the people at the office.)

"A man?" she repeated with studied amazement. "I can't think who——"

The telephone in the hallway jangled, loud and long. As she ran to it, she remembered that her mother could hear every word she said.

"Hello!" . . . Lin's voice answered. . . . "Where are you?" she demanded.

"Armand's." A wave of anger swept over her; fear blotted it out.

"How are you? What's the matter? Are you—are you sick?"

"I'm not stewed, if that's what you mean. But I'm about through. I got your note, but I won't go back to the office. What's the use?"

"But you've got to go back to the office!" (What did he think his wife and children would do, if he lost his job?)

"They've all got it in for me. This trip I thought I'd show them, put something over; but—— Hell, I'm no good. You'd better drop me."

So he was in that mood again! Sometimes it followed a drunk; always it led to one. Now, in between, there was still time——

"Listen!" she said. "You stay right there, where you are, till I get there. . . . Yes, I'm coming down; I'll be there in fifteen minutes. Wait for me!"

In the five steps to her mother's door, she made up her story.

"Mother——" Her voice was dry and hard. "It's a girl in the office. She's sick at a restaurant downtown—ptomaine, she says. Probably she's had too much to drink. That was the boy who was with her that telephoned a while ago. He lost his nerve—ran out on her, left her alone. I've got to get her home. She lives over in Astoria, so I may be out rather late."

"These people who think it's smart to break the law——!" Mrs. Pryor sighed.

"Have you any money, mother? I'll have to take a taxi—can't count on the subway at this time of night; and I paid an insurance premium to-day——"

"You'll find three dollars in my purse, on the dresser. . . . You're knocking everything over. Turn on the light."

"I've got it, now." In the darkness Eunice bent over her mother and kissed her. "Don't worry, mamma; I'll be safe enough. Good night."

In the taxi, she wondered if that story had got over, even in the dark. . . . But she'd never suspect me of anything, she thought drearily. Anybody else, maybe, but not me. . . . Rotten. . . .

Lin was right; she ought to drop him. Even if she saved him now, there'd be another time, and another. . . . And she wasn't much in love with him. She'd begun by being sorry for him—a square peg in a round hole; she found him amusing in his saner moods; his sudden headlong adoration had warmed and flattered her, his pathetic need of her had stirred her pity. The rest—loneliness, and a desperation that used to seize her as she looked ahead, down an endless corridor of empty years; years that would never build up into anything, that were only to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow. . . . And finally desire—impersonal desire that focused on him because he, and no one else, was there. But she'd never pretended to be much in love with him.

And here she was, hunting him in a speakeasy at one A. M. Crazy. . . .

He was in a booth at the end of the dining-room, an empty glass on the table; he was white, shaky, a wreck. She sat down facing him.

"No, Lin, I don't want a drink. Neither do you. . . . How did it happen?"

"Oh, I muffed my big chance, as usual. Sibley. I had an average good trip, till I went to Elmira. Knew I'd get a bonus if I sold Sibley. I gave him that sales talk we worked out together. . . . You could have sold him, with that talk; but I—— Honestly, Eunice, I did my damnedest, but it wasn't enough. I'm just no good."

She supposed he really had done his best—and it wasn't enough. Something in his makeup simply couldn't rise to the decisive chance.

"When did you get back to town?" she asked.

"Yesterday—about six. My train was late—couldn't catch you at the office. Anyway, I was ashamed to come back to you licked. So I took a drink, and—— Well, I took too many. . . . But I haven't been drinking to-day; just a couple this morning to set me up, and one or two this afternoon. I need one now, though. Let's——"

"No more, Lin. . . . You spent two days in Elmira? Then all we've got to do is to explain this last day, and persuade Barclay he didn't see you. I can think up some story—— But you've got to look all right when you show up at the office to-morrow. . . . Yes, of course you're going to the office! No more nonsense!" He scowled—then looked at her, and shrugged in acquiescence. "Of course!" said Eunice severely. "You know you've got to keep your job. . . . Why didn't you go home last night?"

"Oh—Mabel and I had a row before I left. Nobody's fault, specially; she does her damnedest too, and doesn't get much out of it. . . . But I made Niagara Falls this trip. We'd been there on our honeymoon. I got to thinking how different things were now—— Couldn't go back to her, just yet."

"Lin, does she—— She doesn't know anything about me, does she?"

"My God, no! Do you think I'd tell her?"

"No, but—— When you're away from home so much, she must wonder——"

"Maybe she wonders, but she never asks. Things are bad enough for her now; but if we split up, without any money—— You don't ask questions if you couldn't stand the answer."

He began trying to roll a cigarette. . . . She knew she ought to send him home. But he might not be able to get a train for an hour, and if she let him out of her sight he'd start drinking. Besides, he'd have to come back so early in the morning. . . . And besides, Eunice realized, I don't want him to go home.

"Lin, would a Turkish bath make you feel any better?"

"I don't want a Turkish bath. You're all that makes me feel better. . . . Last night, Eunice, if I hadn't got drunk I'd have jumped under a subway train. I was feeling about as rotten to-night, till you came down. But so long as you're around——" He looked about him. "This dump seems to be closing up. Let's have a couple before they turn us out."

"No more!" she commanded. . . . If she left him, in this nervous disintegration—— "Let's walk around outside a while," she suggested.

But they came out into a spatter of chill rain. A taxi slid up to them, inviting. . . . But he couldn't afford one of those endless taxi rides around the Park. They looked at each other uncertainly.

"I—I've got a room in a hotel around the corner," he stammered.

"Oh, Lin! It's half past one. I couldn't."

"You could come in for a while. . . . Please don't leave me yet."

"But wouldn't they think it was queer, my coming in so late?"

"They don't look as if they ask questions. . . . Just a little while——"

But whenever she left him he'd go out to hunt a drink. Unless he had a bottle in his suitcase. She'd have to look for that.

"Wait in the taxi, Lin, while I phone mother. I've got to add a few embellishments to my story. . . . But of course I must! You know I've never dared stay out all night before. . . . Yes—— This time——"

Presently she came back and got in beside him, abrupt and sullen.

"I hate lies!" she snapped. "I'm no good at them, either. Still, maybe I got away with it this time. . . . Leave a six-thirty call at the desk; I'll have to go home before I go to the office. . . . Why? To change my clothes, of course. Can't go to work bareheaded, can

I, in a dinner dress? Why didn't I think of that before I started down here? Crazy, I guess." Her frigid tension dissolved, her arms went round him. "Oh, darling, darling! I love you so terribly much——"

V

Outside, the morning was ash-gray; at seven they had the dingy hotel breakfast room to themselves. Even the waiter who had brought their coffee—or a scalding tasteless fluid that passed for coffee—had retired to a distant table where he sat half asleep. Suddenly Eunice set down her cup, the tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Oh, I can't stand it, Lin, I can't stand it! I'm not built for this sort of thing! . . . Oh, what are we going to do?"

"Why can't you stand it? Because I'm married—or because we're not?"

"No, I—I don't mind that. . . . Your wife—— I might mind if I knew her; but somehow she's never seemed real. . . . But I hate lies! I hate to sneak and pretend! I hate to feel that hotel clerks and bellboys are snickering at me! It makes me feel smudgy! . . . And this isn't smudgy——"

She was sobbing uncontrollably, now. With a glare that drove back the inquisitive waiter Lin was beside her, his arm around her, petting, soothing. Presently her sobs died away; she dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Sorry, dear. Silly of me. I won't do that again. . . . Can you—can you light my cigarette for me?"

He lighted it; then, back in his own chair, he scowled savagely.

"Eunice, if I was any good, I'd find some way out. . . . I suppose you wonder why I don't get a divorce and marry you. Mabel'd let me have it—wouldn't even name you, if I went at it right. . . . But those boys of mine—they're tough young hellions, hard for her to handle. I help a little. Our house—— Ramshackle old dump, but better than anything she and the kids could get, on any alimony I could pay. We just get by, all of us living together. To pull it all down on their heads—it wouldn't seem right."

"Of course not. I—I wouldn't think of letting you do a thing like that. . . . No, I'll be all right. This sneaking around cheap hotels, and lying to everybody, just got on my nerves. I wouldn't mind it if I had a place of my own, where you could come and stay with me sometimes."

"Well? Do you have to live with your mother? She's got a lot of friends up-town; you could tell her you had to live near the office——"

"She couldn't imagine my leaving her, except to get married. And she's no fool; she'd see through that story. . . . Lin, if she knew it would kill her. She's broadened in some ways, but she still thinks there are only two kinds of women. If she ever dreamed that I——"

His eyes questioned her.

"No," she said, "she's never suspected me—yet.

Always before, when I'd been with you, I told her I'd been to the movies. Last night I said I had to stay with a sick girl. Maybe she'll believe that one, this time; she's never heard it before. But it wouldn't work twice. . . . Oh, I hate to lie, Lin! I hate it!"

"Listen!" he said. "There's a fellow in Buffalo I get along with pretty well. He offered me a job last week. Only seventy-five; still, I could send most of it to Mabel, and come down for a week-end now and then. You could get a job anywhere. We could take an apartment together in Buffalo, as Mr. and Mrs.——"

"What would I tell mother?" He shrugged impatiently. "I suppose you think I've got a mother complex, too," she said. "No such thing. She and I get along about as well as any two people get along in four rooms, but that's all. But she does her job, Lin. She makes my money keep two about as well as I could make it keep one. She takes care of my house, cooks my meals, mends my clothes, nurses me when I'm sick—like a wife. Together we live in decent comfort; but I couldn't support two establishments any more than you could. And I feel the way about her that you feel about your wife—it wouldn't be decent to pull everything down on her head. If I was getting married it might be different. But for what she'd call living in sin——"

A long silence. She rubbed out the stub of her cigarette.

"Well?" he muttered. "What are we going to do, then?"

"I guess there's nothing we can do. Except go on—as long as we can."

"As long as we can? What's to stop us?"

"Lin, how long do you suppose we can get away with this without somebody in the office finding out? It's so hard to—to act as if you were just anybody, when you come up to my desk. And no matter how careful we are, somebody might always run into us in a hotel elevator. If Hannegan knew——"

"He'd fire us both," Lin conceded.

"He wouldn't fire me; I make up his income tax. . . . But that's rotten too—to have to think of what you've got on the man you work for!"

"Well—one of us had better get a job somewhere else."

"Sixty-dollar secretarial jobs can't be picked up every day. I'm worth that to Hannegan because I know his business better than he does; but it would take time to make myself worth it to anybody else. And you——"

"Yes. Not much competition for my services. . . . Well, we've been careful; we've got away with it for six months. We can go on being careful and get away with it——"

"Unless something happens," said Eunice drearily. He glared.

"Nothing's going to happen, I tell you!"

"I hope not. That *would* be hell. . . Oh, Lin, why do we talk about it? There's nothing we can do!"

"No, unless—— I know what I ought to say," he offered, his eyes avoiding hers. "I ought to say we

could stop—give it up. You're the best friend I've ever had; we'd still have that. . . . But I can't give you up. Not while we live in the same town, where I can see you if I try——"

She laughed shakily.

"I'm glad of that, my dear. Because I couldn't give you up either." She looked at her wrist-watch. "Lin, I've got to go. Get your check—quick." She took out her compact, inspected herself in the tiny mirror. "My God, do I look like that? And I've rouged as much as I dare—— Listen, Lin, I've thought up a story for you to tell Hannegan. Walk over to the subway with me, and I'll tell you about it."

The waiter came, and went. Lin reached in his pockets for cigarettes, whistled softly, and held up a flask.

"Forgot this, Eunice. Just a drink apiece. . . . Now listen, a man with a hangover is a whole lot better for just one next morning. I'll bet you could use one yourself."

"If you took one you wouldn't stop. And I——"

She had never needed a drink so badly in her life; but when she went home her mother would kiss her. The story that might barely get over now would never get over, if she smelled of whisky.

"Not this morning, Lin. Give me that flask!" She emptied it into the coffee pot. "Lin, I'll see you in two hours, at the office. For those two hours, I've got to trust you. Not one drop! . . . Promise me?"

He promised with a gravity that would have warmed her soul, if she could have believed it would last. . . .

As they walked to the subway she coached him in the story he was to tell Hannegan; then, on the steps, they kissed each other good-by. Not like parting lovers, she thought as she dropped her nickel into the turnstile slot; more like husband and wife. . . . She wondered if she'd like being a wife. Not much fun, according to most of the wives she knew; but easier, maybe, than having to be your mother's husband and your lover's mother.

VI

At that hour of the morning the uptown subway express was almost empty; but she clung to a strap because if she sat down she'd go to sleep and ride on to the end of the line. She could feel the other passengers staring at her—bareheaded, haggard, the coral dinner gown showing under her coat. She knew she looked as if she'd been out all night. Some people wouldn't mind it; but it made her feel smudgy.

The Hundred and Sixteenth Street station, tiled in blue and white; the Columbia campus, swept by a bracing wind; Morningside, home of plain living, high thinking, and decorously repressed emotions. The apartment house lobby—empty, thank God; she didn't have to face the elevator boy. . . . She let herself into the apartment. Now for it——

"Hello, mother!" she called cheerily. "It's rather wearing, being a good Samaritan."

Her mother met her—smiling, serene, untroubled. They kissed.

"I do hope the young woman is all right now, Eunice."

"Yes, she's going to work. But the poor child was a wreck, mother; I don't know what she'd have done without me. . . . Breakfast? I had some coffee in Times Square, between subways. . . . Yes, I could use some more. Thanks a lot."

In the bedroom she tore off her clothes, shaking with relief. . . . She doesn't know! I got away with it! . . . A warm bath relaxed her, a cold shower braced her; clean clothes, her office dress, took away some of that smudgy feeling. On the breakfast table was a steaming pot of coffee—real coffee, this time; smoking popovers, crisp bacon. Amazed, Eunice found that she could eat.

By the window, her mother was reading the morning paper. "I didn't know when you'd be in," she apologized, "so I've had my breakfast. And I want to finish Mr. Macdonald's speech on parity. It really looks as if they're beginning to get somewhere with this disarmament."

And that was all—except, eventually, a hasty goodby. . . . Good wife! thought Eunice as she hurried back to the subway. Gets you a bang-up breakfast and asks no questions. But I wonder . . .

She had had the feeling that the air was heavy with questions unasked, questions that never could be asked because the answer might pull everything down on their heads. But that, she decided, was only nerves. She'd got away with it—this time. But there would be a next time; she knew Lin.

She was beginning to know herself, too.

She breezed cheerily into the office. Three men were talking at the water cooler; she passed them with a gay "Hello, boys!" Then——

"Well, there's Lin Valentine! We've been wondering where you were."

He smiled at her. A little pale, but—— Yes, he looked all right.

"That's a long story, Miss Pryor. But you'd hardly want to hear it now," he went on easily. "I'll save it for Mr. Hannegan."

But Mr. Hannegan didn't come in till half past ten; and when he came, he looked the way Eunice felt.

"Valentine?" he said. "I don't want to think about Valentine, this morning. Has he told you his story? Does it sound straight? . . . All right. But tell him to wire us next time he's going to change his schedule. . . . Miss Pryor, I had the scare of my life last night. My daughter drove her car bang into another on the Pelham Parkway. It's a miracle somebody wasn't killed . . . No, she wasn't hurt; nobody was hurt. But that kid will break her neck some day. Got no judgment, can't hold her liquor—— God, I envy you bachelors!"

VII

Mrs. Pryor sat on a bench on Morningside Drive—a tiny Riviera, warmed by the sun, sheltered from the wind. Presently one of her friends would join her—some widow, placid and cheerful, or one of the young

mothers who came out with their baby carriages; and they would have a good talk about the constructive, worth-while interests of settled women.

Meanwhile Mrs. Pryor thought about Mr. Macdonald's splendid speech on parity and disarmament, about the interesting lecture she was going to hear at the university that evening. She thought about these things hard and resolutely, to keep from thinking about anything else. Then, as she saw Mrs. Cheeves approaching, recollection of something Mrs. Cheeves had said last night brought a warm wave of reassurance that she dared not analyze, of release from some apprehension that she dared not name. . . .

Girls who have lovers look happy.

FREE SOIL

"PARDON me," said the woman in the next chair. "Have you a match?" Carson Blake handed her a clip without turning his eyes from the quotation board, where a young man was taking down cards and putting up new ones, black-lettered on green, while another young man droned monotonously: "Anaconda, ninety-three and a half; Nash, forty-eight and three-quarters: Atchison——"

In the corner a ticker clicked and sputtered; men with their hats on, chewing cigars, clustered round it; men and women in the ranks of leather armchairs strained forward tensely, their eyes on the running ribbon of light above the board where cryptic letters, fractional numbers, measured the progressing collapse of a prosperity that was to have endured forever, an economic philosophy that was to have marked a new permanent high level of human happiness. All over the country, in ten thousand rooms like this, men and women were staring at that running ribbon of light, incredulous, dumbfounded; reluctantly driven to admit that even in this new era the whole was no larger than the sum of its parts . . .

Blake stifled a yawn; he didn't care about the market. You couldn't really worry about stocks like Steel and General Electric, no matter how low they

were quoted on a day of panic. Besides, most of his money was invested in a closely held stock unknown to the exchanges—Blake Separator Corporation of Heliopolis, Ohio, paying eighteen per cent. He had dropped in here only because he had reached the Plaza twenty minutes before Anita was to meet him. . . . Through the haze of cigar and cigarette smoke he could see, across the street, the autumnal red and gold of the Park. Glorious day. Perhaps she'd have time to drive in the Park with him, after lunch. . . .

"Thanks," said the woman in the next chair, returning his matches. "It really seems to have started back up, doesn't it?"

For the first time he looked at her—a smart blonde in black, with a choker of turquoise beads that matched her eyes; and, on the slim hand that held her cigarette, a wedding ring. . . . Of course. Everybody in New York had been married—at least the people one knew; though not many of the people one knew seemed to be married now. This woman, obviously, was the sort of person one knew—what used to be called a lady. She had spoken to a stranger; but strangers were speaking to each other this week, in the customers' rooms of brokers' offices, as naturally as strangers in a life-boat after the shipwreck.

"Yes," he agreed, "if Rockefeller's buying it's probably safe for the rest of us."

"I caught the turn on General Motors," she said. "Got it at thirty-five. A panic's rather fun if you know what you want, and keep your head."

Her cool blue eyes were studying him frankly; he

supposed he was the sort of person she knew. Tall, aquiline, perfectly dressed, with just a touch of silver at his temples, he looked like the first secretary of an embassy. He knew that because women had told him so, since he came to New York. If his wife had never told him so, back in Heliopolis, it was perhaps because she had never seen the first secretary of an embassy.

"My congratulations," he said. "I've kept out of it—no runs, no hits, no errors. Not very sporting, I'm afraid." She smiled.

"No, you'll never win anything unless you risk a loss."

She turned back to the board; the next move, he realized, was his. . . . The next move. Ten years ago this couldn't have happened, with a woman like this; but times had changed. If he suggested that they come back after lunch and see how the market was going—she'd go to lunch with him; they could get acquainted, look each other over. And it might end there. But ten to one they'd find they knew some of the same people. Everybody knew some of the same people, somewhere; even Lucia Rommel had known some Heliopolis people, at Palm Beach. So, if they liked each other, it might grow into a casual friendship; or it might——

This woman wouldn't lose her head; but if she made up her mind she'd take what she wanted. He knew her type—well-to-do, unoccupied, disillusioned; ten years older than she looked and twenty years older than she felt; and lonesome—one of the hundred thousand lonesome women in New York. Four years

ago, when he first came to town from Ohio, he'd have asked her to go to lunch with him; even now, if he hadn't had an appointment—— But nobody ever broke a date with Anita Burch.

He rose, picked up his hat and gloves and stick. "Well, I've an engagement. Best of luck with your General Motors."

Her nod was indifferent; he knew she didn't believe he had a date. She probably thought he was married. He was a little ashamed at being set down, even by a stranger, as some one who was afraid to risk a loss. But perhaps she was right. . . .

II

On the pillared porch of the Fifth Avenue entrance he waited for Anita, watching the sunlight on the gray-green leaves of the plane trees around the fountain, the double column of motor-cars on the cross-street—one column halted, waiting for the turn, the other flowing eastward. He felt an immense well-being, the distillate of perfect health, of investments that needn't be worried about even on this calamitous day, of the golden afternoon before him. The afternoon of a middle-aged faun, prosperous and leisured, who could afford to pass by an attractive woman because a more attractive woman was waiting for him. . . . Not that there was anything between him and Anita; she gave him nothing but her time, her talk. But a dozen men envied him that. . . .

A whistle blew, a green light changed to red; he saw

her starting across the street—a trim little figure in green-gray tweeds, an elfish face above a silver fox fur, a touch of coppery hair beneath a green-gray hat. Through the column of halted cars she edged her way; and came out, unexpectedly, into the column that had started moving, circling the fountain and turning south. She dodged, leaped—— A rushing car hid her for an instant. When he saw her again, she was a green-gray heap on the curb.

"Anita!" he cried. Not till brakes screamed in his ear did he realize that he had plunged straight through the traffic, toward her. By the time he reached her she had picked herself up and was dusting her suit.

"Hello, Kit!" (That was her private pet name for him; it was short for Kit Carson, the Boy Scout.) "Rushing to the rescue like a St. Bernard?" But her smile faded as he seized her hands, stared into her green-gray eyes.

"Anita! You—— You're all right? You aren't hurt?"

"Not a bit—just intensely annoyed. I fell over my own feet, trying to get out of the way. . . . Why, Kit dear! It's all right! Nothing happened to me! But you——" Her voice faltered, now. "You were crazy, to dive through the traffic like that. Don't do it again." Her hand slipped into his arm. "Come—it's all over. Let's forget it, and go to lunch."

But they both knew it wasn't all over. Something was beginning.

Mrs. Burch wrote a little, and rather brilliantly, for *Vanity Fair* and the *New Yorker;* but her real occupa-

tion was lunching out. She was known in certain circles as the Destruction That Wasteth at Noonday, because when you took her out to lunch you stayed on, if she would let you, for tea. But this time she had little to say, and Blake had less. The tension of that moment on the curb was still unresolved.

"We're abominably dull to-day, Kit," she told him over the coffee.

"Then we'd better not inflict ourselves on other people. Let's get a horse cab, and drive around the Park and up to the Claremont for tea. Then we'll go home and dress, and dine together, and go to the theater——"

"But haven't you anything to do? Aren't you losing a lot of money, or trying to make it, in this crazy market?"

"I haven't lost a nickel, except on paper; and I don't want to make any more money. I've got enough to live on, and not enough to worry about. Come on, Anita. It's a great day for driving in the Park."

"I couldn't have dinner with you; I'm dining with some people, and going somewhere with them afterward. Where is it, now? . . . Why, the opening of the opera, of course! You'll be there, won't you?"

"I will not," said Carson Blake. "What I like about New York is that you don't have to do anything you don't want to do. And I don't care a hoot about grand opera."

"Don't call it grand opera, Kit—that's Heliopolis. In New York, it's all supposed to be grand."

"Grand or not, I don't like it . . . But it's five

hours till dinner. I don't care what you've got to do this afternoon; don't do it."

"I think that's why I like you," she said. "You've no purpose in life. So different from the younger men I know."

"Younger men? How old do you think I am?"

"Oh, ninety-seven at least. That's why you look thirty-seven and act twenty-seven. If you were twenty-seven you'd look thirty-seven, and feel ninety-seven. . . . Really, Kit, have you a married daughter? Or were you just kidding me?"

"I really have. But we marry young, in our family. I was married at nineteen—the night my wife and I graduated from high school." (That would make him forty-five, she computed, or a little less—the nicest age, for a man. She had just turned thirty, herself.) "As for a purpose in life," he went on grimly, "I certainly had one then—trying to support a family on twenty dollars a week. And as I kept getting higher in the business they kept dropping more purposes on me. I had to be president of the Chamber of Commerce, and the School Board; and a trustee of the church, and delegate to the Rotary International. I had to belong to everything——"

"Kit, don't tell me you were a Shriner and an Elk!"

"I certainly was; and a Knight of Pythias, and a Loyal Moose, and a Woodman of the World. And whenever they were raising money for any worthy cause I had to start the list with a thousand or two—had to, I tell you! You'd see how it was, if you'd ever lived in a town like that. Somebody had to keep

things going, and I'd gradually got to be the big man of Heliopolis. But when I moved to New York, where the town seemed to be running itself pretty well before I got here, and my income wasn't worth tapping for worthy causes, and nobody cared a damn what I did—— Why, I felt like a runaway slave on free soil!" She was staring into her coffee cup.

"Kit—— If your wife had lived, would you have stayed in Heliopolis?"

"Oh, I suppose so. She liked New York for a week; but she wanted to live in a town where she knew everybody's business and everybody knew hers." He was silent a moment, remembering. She hadn't called him "Kit," she had called him "father." He could hear the echo of her voice—"Oh, *father!* . . . *No,* father! . . . Don't be absurd, father!" . . . He knew perfectly well that she'd never have let him leave Heliopolis. "She was a fine woman," he added in hasty compunction. "She did a lot of good. But when she was gone—— Well, Leila was married, and Junior was in college, and my brother-in-law could run the business. I figured that I'd served my time."

"Yes," she mused, "that's why we like New York. We're free. People like you and me, I mean; it's different if you're Al Smith or J. P. Morgan, or if you're bringing up children. But people like us—I know how you feel, Kit. I had a purpose in life myself, once."

"You?" It was the last thing he would ever have associated with her.

"Yes, indeed. I was married at eighteen—a war bride. Married for a week; then, for a year and a half, I bit my nails and waited for my husband. He came back with tuberculosis, and an itch to write the great war novel. Luckily he had money; I took him to Saranac and got him more or less cured, and then he started work and caved in again, so I took him back to Saranac—— That went on for four years, till his lungs finally got him. . . . I was rather crazy about him, you see, and he was crazy about me; only he had to finish that novel. So my purpose in life was to keep him alive enough to work himself to death, if you can figure that out. . . . Yes, he finished it. I took it around afterward, but nobody'd ever publish it. He could write a novel about as well as I could write a million-dollar check. . . . But that four years taught me that responsibility is out of my line. . . . Come, Kit—let's take that drive."

They went out toward the pillared porch. In the crowded corridor a woman in black drifted past them; Anita gasped, and ran up to her. . . . Carson Blake stared; there was something familiar about the other woman's figure; it couldn't be the woman of the broker's office—— It wasn't; he saw that as she turned to Anita—dark-haired, dark-eyed, melancholy. He wished to God it had been the woman of the broker's office—or anybody else.

"Lucia!" Anita was saying. "How are you? I haven't seen you in years! . . . Mrs. Rommel, this is—— Oh! You know each other?" Blake was bowing, his lips set.

"Yes, indeed." The dark woman smiled. "Nice to see you, Carson. . . . How are you, Anita? I read the things you write—— No, I can't stop now. I'm late already for a haircut."

"Will you come to lunch with me some time soon?" Anita asked. "I do want to see you, Lucia. I'm in the phone book. Call me up, won't you?"

Mrs. Rommel disappeared, in a taxi. Blake saw that out of the corner of his eye, and hoped his relief was decently concealed. He was looking past the rank of cars to a solitary hansom cab; he hailed it, peremptorily.

"Lovely," said Anita, as the half doors closed on them and horseshoes clacked on the asphalt. "This would be something to tell our grandchildren about, if we had any—a ride in the last hansom cab in New York. . . . Where did you know Lucia Rommel?"

"Oh, I met her at dinner—I forget where. I used to see her now and then. It must be a year since the last time." (He hated to think about the ten or twenty times she'd called him up since then; he hated the whole wretched affair.)

"I knew her at school," said Anita. "She was two or three years ahead of me, of course. Looks older than that, doesn't she? But she had an awful time with her husband. She always had a little of that tragedy-queen manner, but of course he made it worse. . . . I don't believe I've seen her since she got her divorce. I'd have thought she was the type that would marry again; but I suppose with three children, she has plenty to keep her interested."

They were jogging through the Park, now.

"So there's a type that marries again?" he asked. "What is it?"

"The people who aren't strong enough to stand freedom."

"Freedom!" he said. "Try and get it! When I saw you in a heap on the curb, Anita, I knew there wasn't any more freedom. Not for me."

Her green-gray eyes were frightened.

"B-but, Kit, I was all right. Nothing happened to me."

"No, but if it had——"

The tension snapped; she was in his arms, clinging desperately, meeting his kisses with headlong response. . . . At last she drew away, stared out of the cab window. His arm was still about her, her hands lay in one of his.

"Anita! Will you marry me?"

"I'll never marry anybody. I've been married."

"But—— You love me, don't you?"

"Of course. . . . That was another thing I wasn't ever going to do again—fall in love. But when I saw you plunging into that traffic——"

"Yes," he said. "We've been drifting toward this for weeks, but it took our adventures with the traffic to wake us up. . . . Please marry me, Anita." Her fingers clenched on his.

"No, Kit. I'm afraid to. . . . I suppose you've heard that I've had affairs with men——"

"I don't care if you've had a dozen—I want you to

marry me. I've had affairs myself. . . . Well, only one real one; but——"

"I never had any, Kit. Not one. If you go around much with a man your friends think you're having an affair; but I never did. . . . Because I was afraid. Afraid of responsibility—afraid that I'd fall in love with somebody, or somebody would fall in love with me. I'd had enough of that."

"Well?" he demanded. She shrugged helplessly.

"Oh, yes—it's happened, now. . . . I'll be your mistress, Kit. But I won't marry you."

"I don't want you to be my mistress. . . . I mean—I do, of course; but that isn't—— If you get knocked down in the traffic I want to have a right to pick you up, and carry you home, and sit right beside your bed till you're well again, without anybody asking what business it is of mine——"

"Exactly what we both came to New York to get away from. . . . You know you never meant to marry again. I've heard you say so."

"I've changed my mind. . . . Anita, I'm crazy about you. I think I'm going to stay crazy about you, too; nothing ever felt like this before. I don't want to—to just see you when we both have an evening off; I want to live with you——"

"That's just what kills it—living together."

"It does sometimes. But this is different."

"Oh, dear!" she sighed. "You do act twenty-seven."

"No, Anita, I'm acting grown up. We can't be

free from what we feel about each other, whether we marry or not; what happens to one of us happens to both of us, now. But in every other way we'd be free. You have your own income and I have mine; we're old enough not to interfere with each other's friends; I haven't any business associates you'd have to meet; your relatives are all dead and mine live six hundred miles away. And I don't suppose you'd want children——"

"My God, no! I did once—at Saranac. But luckily I don't seem able to have any."

"I don't want any more, either. So you and I would be as free as we are now."

"Kit, you can't be free if you're married to somebody you care for. As Mr. and Mrs. Blake we'd always be asked out together, and one would want to go and the other one would want to stay at home—— That sounds silly, but it's the sort of thing that makes trouble. We might even be jealous——"

"You can't win anything without risking a loss. . . . That's a quotation," he admitted. "Anita—— Just before I met you to-day a woman tried to pick me up, in a broker's office. A perfectly nice woman—you could see that; just lonesome. We'd have gone to lunch, and if she hadn't liked me it would have stopped there. But if she had liked me, she wouldn't have been afraid. . . . Well, I didn't want her—I wanted you; but I admired her. She wasn't afraid. And if I thought that I was afraid to risk marrying the woman I love——"

"You'd better go back to the broker's office," she

said savagely. "Probably your nice brave lonesome woman is still looking at the ticker. It would be a pity to let me cash in on something she started."

"We might even be jealous," he said softly. "Even if we weren't married. . . . Anita, the thing you were afraid of has happened; you're in love—and so am I. I'll take you on any terms, but I think we'd be a couple of damned cowards if we didn't get married."

She was staring out at the autumn foliage.

"Oh, we're crazy even to think of it. . . . Still," she sighed, "married or not, I'd hate it if you went back to that woman in the broker's office. And I wish you were going to the opera with me to-night, though I know you'd be bored. . . . Yes, I've got to go; I'm indebted to these people. But I might break away from the party afterward, and call you up. Will you be in?"

"All evening," he promised. "Waiting to hear from you."

"You will. . . . But now, Kit, I think you'd better take me home; I'm all limp. . . . No, I don't want tea; I want to go home by myself, and think. Anyway——" She smiled wearily. "We're probably the only two people in the United States, this afternoon, who aren't talking about the stock market. If we care that much about each other—— Oh, it might work, Kit; it might work! If I come this evening I'll come to stay. Always. . . ."

III

He felt rather limp himself when he left her at her apartment, and went on to his hotel. He'd never meant to get entangled in anything like this. . . . Like this! There had never been anything like this! He was in love with her as the boy of nineteen who had married on the night of his graduation from high school could never have loved any woman; as Carson Blake, adult and clear-headed, had never supposed he could love any woman. And they had shaken off their shackles; they had no attachments, no responsibilities, no entanglements that might hamper their relation to each other; free man and free woman, they came together on free soil. In the mirror in the hotel lobby he saw that he looked thirty-seven, and felt not a day over twenty-seven.

But his spirits fell a moment later, when he stopped at the desk for his key, and the switchboard girl spoke to him.

"Oh, Mr. Blake, there was a lady called you twice this afternoon. She asked the desk to send up a bellboy to make sure you weren't in, when I told her you didn't answer. . . . No, she didn't leave her name."

"Think you'd recognize her voice again?" he asked. "Positively? . . . Then if she calls again, tell her I've gone to the country."

Lucia, of course; it could be no one else. It was months since she had called him last; he had hoped and believed that she had come to her senses. There

was nothing he could say to her, or she to him, that hadn't been said once for all a year ago. He was sorry for her, but there was nothing he could do for her; nothing she could do for him but let him alone. He'd thought she realized that by now, but that chance meeting at the Plaza must have stirred her up again. . . . Poor Lucia!

But he had no thoughts to waste on Lucia. It would be midnight before he could hope to hear from Anita, if she was going to the opera. Only five o'clock now. He drank a high-ball and set himself to kill time, looking over the evening paper, trying to take the proper interest in the details of a financial collapse that would take up space in the histories, in the text-books of economics, a hundred years from now. But it was no use; he could think of nothing but Anita.

He killed more time bathing, shaving, dressing with meticulous care. Seven-thirty. He would have dinner sent up from the hotel restaurant; afterward he could play solitaire, turn on the radio——

The door-bell rang.

. . . . Lucia; it must be Lucia. In an apartment hotel, callers who knew the number of his suite could come up unannounced; and she knew it well enough—there had been a time when she came to see him two or three times a week. . . . But she didn't know he was in. He wouldn't go to the door. If he kept perfectly still she'd go away, eventually——

Another ring, long and imperious. That couldn't be Lucia; she would be tentative, humble. He opened the door.

Anita stood waiting, wrapped in a white opera cape, a collar of white fur framing her coppery hair. Speechless with amazement and relief, he held out his arms; but she put them aside.

"Not now, Kit. I've got to talk to you."

She tossed the cape on a chair. Her evening gown of ivory satin clung to her knees, trailed about her ankles; its back was split, clear to the waist, by a long spear-point of golden sun tan. In short-skirted tweeds she was elfish, gamine; in trailing ivory draperies, a rope of pearls about her throat, she was a rather stately lady. She sat down in an armchair, lighted a cigarette. Her opaque eyes, wandering restlessly, came to the bottle, siphon, glasses, on the table; she poured herself a drink of whisky, gulped it down.

"I needed that, Kit." She stared sullenly through the smoke of her cigarette. "Well!" she said at last. "You've played hell."

"What? . . . How?"

"Lucia, of course. . . . At least I hope it's of course; I'd hate to think you leave wrecks like that all over town. . . . She came to see me while I was dressing; and the first thing she said was, 'So it's you who took him away from me!' Nice thing to have drop on you, when you're trying to make up your mind whether to marry a man or not." She paused, but he could say nothing. "I don't know why I never heard of this till now," she said. "I guess I didn't know you when it was going on, and I'd lost track of Lucia. Still, I seem to hear about everything that happens——"

"Nobody knew," he managed to articulate. "We had to be very careful. On account of her children, you know. . . . It was over before I ever met you."

"So I gathered, eventually—though it was pretty hard to get the chronology out of a mess of hysterics. . . . Kit, it was horrible! She didn't seem to have anything against me in particular—just kept begging me to give you back to her. As if I wouldn't mind it at all. . . . And she's quite a civilized person, Kit. . . . I guess you know that. . . . Quite civilized; and, I'd have supposed, sane. Plain cuckoo she was, this evening. . . . How in God's name did it happen? I couldn't get much of a story out of her."

"It's hardly my place——" he began. Her hand waved impatiently.

"Oh, don't be chivalrous! That won't help me—or Lucia either. . . . She was chivalrous; she kept insisting, whenever she thought of it, that it wasn't your fault. But I've got a right to know about it."

He was too upset to wonder why she had a right.

"I'll tell you as honestly as I can," he said hoarsely. "She'd been divorced a couple of years, when I met her. She was another one who said she'd never marry again, because she'd been married. But she was human, and healthy, and lonesome—and so was I. We liked each other, but there was no pretense of sentiment, when it began. Well—we got on pretty well together, and she fell in love with me. We hadn't meant to fall in love, either of us; that was quite understood. I suppose I ought to have broken it off, when I realized that she had——"

"But you were too soft-hearted to hurt her," said Anita bitterly. "So you kept on, and hurt her about twenty times as much, eventually. . . . Oh, I'm not blaming you; I might have done the same thing. I have done the same thing, practically—let men fall in love with me, and then—— We all skate around on the surface, and keep ourselves free from anything that might mean responsibility or inconvenience; and then when we run into something raw and real we don't know how to handle it."

"I'm afraid I'm more to blame than that. I never told her I was in love with her, but I probably acted like it, for a while. I was quite fond of her. She—— Well, I hadn't been in New York very long. I came here for freedom, and I liked it; but once in a while it was a shock to be reminded that I wasn't in Heliopolis, where I'd been the center of the universe. Lucia made me feel that I was the center of the universe, still."

"All the comforts of home, eh?" She was savage.

"Not home!" he said. "At home I was just the fellow that was always wrong. But Lucia pampered me——"

"I wish to God I'd known you then, Kit. I could have pampered you, too. . . . Why did you break it off, finally?" He flushed.

"Well, I—I couldn't live up to her. If you know Lucia—— She has to have a new melodrama every day—fireworks and tears, with a happy ending. I got enough of that. . . . Besides, it was awkward, when I went to her house. I don't mean—— But I dined

there once or twice before this started, and I still went there occasionally as a matter of form. Her children got to calling me Uncle Carson, and her mother obviously thought we were engaged. Of course, when Lucia was seeing me every other day, she couldn't very well tell her mother that she didn't want to marry anybody—even me."

"You idiot, she'd have married you like a shot. She would still. . . . So in short you got tired of her. . . . I'm not blaming you," said Anita. "I guess it wasn't your fault, or hers either; just one of the things that happen. Even careful drivers run over pedestrians, sometimes. Only if you'd had to view the mangled remains, as I did this evening—— When I called up the people who were going to take me to the opera, and told them I was sick, I wasn't lying." She lighted another cigarette.

"Sick of me?" he muttered. "I can't blame you."

"No, my dear—just sick of the jams people get into. Life isn't decent. . . . Lucia's really a nice person, you know. I wish we could do something for her; but of course there isn't a thing——"

"We?" he repeated in utter amazement. She smiled unsteadily.

"Darling, why do you suppose I take this so hard? . . . Because I've discovered that anything that happens to one of us happens to both of us. When Lucia was having hysterics all over my bedroom, I felt as if it was for something I'd done to her myself. I'd have done anything to help her, except the only thing she wanted me to do—give you up."

She stood up, stalked restlessly about the room.

"Kit, you can't conceive the things I felt, while she was raving. Pity, and horror, and stabs of plain raw jealousy—and shame. Shame because she'd given you everything, and I was still hesitating, wondering how much it was safe for me to give you. . . . Safe! We're a lousy lot, we runaway slaves. All for freedom and afraid to live. Lucia wasn't afraid—not even of making herself ridiculous, before the woman you prefer. She's a better person than I am, Kit. She made me feel the way that woman in the broker's office made you feel. . . . Fine pair we are, to need a couple of other people to teach us courage." She faced him, trembling. "So, my dear, if you still want to marry me—— Or if you don't, that's all right too. I'm ready."

He moved toward her, slow, inexorable.

"I want to marry you. You're the only woman I ever really loved——"

They clung together, runaways ready to trade their freedom for something they needed more deeply. The cigarette she had dropped when he seized her smoldered on the rug, unnoticed; her necklace snapped as his arm tightened about her, bending her head back; her pearls cascaded on the rug, rolled across the floor—unnoticed. . . . But at the loud ringing of the doorbell their arms unwound, they sprang apart. Instinctively Anita turned to the wall mirror, raised her hands to her disordered hair. Then, as he moved uncertainly toward the door—

"Wait!" she said swiftly. "If that's Lucia, you leave her to me. Handling Lucia is my job, now."

But the woman who entered, and let the door close with a bang behind her, wasn't Lucia. Carson Blake, staring in cold consternation, would rather have seen Lucia, or anybody else—anybody but this plump, self-satisfied, middle-aged woman, whose clothes and hair-cut were somehow faintly wrong. She took in the scene—the floor littered with scattered pearls, the cigarette smoldering noisomely on the rug; whisky bottle, siphon, glasses, on the table; and a flushed woman in a rumpled evening gown, with hopelessly disheveled red hair. She cast one contemptuous glance at Carson Blake, then turned to Anita, her tight little mouth pursed in disgust. And Anita's nerves had already stood as much to-day as they could bear.

"Another one, Kit?" she flung at him hysterically. "Really, I think you might have given me a list! Then I could have asked them all to tea together, and we could have sat around and got acquainted, and told each other the story of our lives——"

The other woman jerked her head in abysmal scorn. "Who's this, father?"

IV

Father. . . . The word hung in the air, like the echo of a vast and cataclysmic explosion. Carson Blake spoke hoarsely.

"Anita, this is my daughter, Mrs. Parks. . . . Mrs.

Burch, Leila." Imprudently he added—"Mrs. Burch and I are going to be married. To-morrow."

Leila didn't say, "I should hope so." She merely looked it. Anita saw her look it.

"Oh, no!" she said wildly. "We aren't going to be married, Mrs. Parks. I'm only a—a woman he picked up in a broker's office. . . . I'm going, Kit. The scrubwoman can have my pearls, if she'll sweep them up. They're only synthetic."

He snatched the cape out of her hand, thrust her back into her chair, violently. He felt masterful—till he turned and met his daughter's eyes.

"Why does she call you Kit, father?" He didn't answer. Impossible to make Leila understand, as it would have been impossible to make her mother understand, how any woman could think of him as Kit Carson, the Boy Scout. "Father, you—you aren't living under an assumed name, are you?"

"I certainly am not! Leila, you're crazy! . . . We're all a little crazy just now, perhaps; but Anita and I have some excuse. We've just been through a—a rather trying scene." (Leila's eyes said, "I can well believe it.") "But if you had the sense you were born with," he finished furiously, "you'd know I'm using my own name. You called me up twice this afternoon——"

"I didn't, father. I only just got in town." (So it had been Lucia, after all; she must have gone to Anita's apartment, expecting to find him there.) "Dan had to make a business trip to Schenectady," said

Leila, "and I thought I'd come with him and run down here, to talk something over with you. Something I didn't want to write about."

"Why the devil didn't you wire me, so I could meet you?"

"I didn't think of it, I was so worried."

He knew that was a lie; she had wanted to surprise him. Four years ago, when he left Heliopolis, she had expressed her suspicions as to why he was going to New York.

"I'd thought of bringing the children," she added. "But perhaps——"

She broke off, but he knew what she meant. Anita knew it, too.

"What are you worried about?" he growled.

"Junior. . . . That's my brother," she explained for Anita's benefit. "He—he's keeping a woman, father. Quite a dreadful person—she's been divorced twice; and he wants to marry her. We're all terribly upset about it. . . . But perhaps we take such things too seriously," she finished, her eyes rolling toward Anita in all-embracing Christian charity.

Carson Blake opened the door.

"Leila, get out. . . . Where are you staying? . . . The Commodore? All right. I'll see you there at lunch to-morrow, and tell you a few things. Don't you dare leave town till I've talked to you."

"Oh, I want to talk to you, father. There's been trouble at the factory. Junior wanted to use the surplus for expansion, but Uncle Ned invested it in the

stock market. Not in call loans—in stocks. This last week, it's all gone. They'll have to pass the dividend this quarter. . . . I was hoping you'd come back and straighten things out. I suppose you've been making so much money in New York that you don't need your dividends; but for the sake of the rest of us—— Or have you been losing money in the market, too?"

"Not a nickel, except on paper." He felt more in command of the situation now; they'd always let him have his way, when they needed him. "You be ready to lunch with me to-morrow, Leila. And if you behave yourself, and apologize properly to Mrs. Burch, we'll let you come to the wedding." He tried to talk with the gaiety befitting a bridegroom, but he found himself looking uneasily toward Anita for confirmation. And Anita said nothing; sitting in the chair where he had thrust her, she was staring stonily at the wall. . . . Leila looked at them, shrugged, and went out; he stood with his hands in his pockets, scowling.

"I might have known Ned and Junior couldn't manage the business," he muttered. "Still, I thought—— Anita, if that company stops paying dividends I'll have about five thousand a year. Would you marry me on that?"

Her pallid hand, on the arm of the chair, stirred slightly.

"Oh, yes, I'd marry you on five thousand a year, if I were going to marry you at all."

V

"If you——" He stared at her. "Anita! What's the matter?"

"Kit, how old is she?"

"Leila? Thirty-three. I'm fifty-three. . . . That's not so terrible."

"She spoke of children—your grandchildren. . . . How many? How old?"

"Three of them. The oldest is eleven. . . . We marry young, in my family." Anita was still staring at the wall.

"I suppose they'd call me grandma," she said. "And that horrible fat creature would call me mother, after you'd made her stop calling me that woman. . . . She wouldn't, of course; she'd call me Anita. And if she's your daughter of course she isn't a horrible fat creature. She's probably a—a fine woman, who does a lot of good. But I'll always think of her as I first saw her, before I knew who she was. A horrible fat creature. . . . And even if you bullied her into being decent to me, she'd always think of me as she first saw me here to-night—— Oh, I can't do it, Kit!" she cried frantically. "I just can't!"

"Look here, you wouldn't need to have anything to do with my family. They never treated me decently, except when they wanted something from me. The minute I saw Leila I felt like—like a runaway slave overtaken by the bloodhounds. We don't have to pay any attention to them——"

"You said you'd let her come to the wedding. You meant it. You may think better of it now, but that's the way your mind works. A man's children ought to see him married, the second time; it makes it more legal. And I could see you worrying about that factory, wondering if you oughtn't to go back and straighten things out. Of course; it's been your work, your life. But it isn't mine."

She stood up, pulled her white cape about her.

"Lucia was bad enough!" she said desperately. "Every time I see her around town, I'll feel as if she was a cripple your car had run over. I know it wasn't your fault, but—— Still, I could stand that. But this on top of it—— You don't like your family, but you won't break away from them when they need you. And it would be years before I could look Leila in the eye——"

"Because she was rude to you? I'll fix that."

"No, not that. But I know what she thought when she interrupted us; and from her point of view, Kit, she was exactly right. Some women wouldn't mind that—really free women, with no vermiform appendixes of conventionality left sticking to them. But I'd always be ashamed. . . . Oh, Kit, I can't, I can't! It's just too much!"

She moved toward the door; he caught her shoulders.

"Where do you think you are going?"

"I don't know, I don't know! I'd like to go off to a desert island, all by myself—— No, don't worry; I

won't do anything wild. I think I'll just take the next boat to Paris——"

"If you do I'll go with you. They won't follow us there."

"Still hunting free soil? There isn't any, Kit—not for people like us. You drag your past with you wherever you go, unless you can be hard and ruthless. We runaway slaves—— Eliza crossed the river on the ice, but even after she got away from the bloodhounds, she was still black. Her children might have learned how to act free, but she couldn't. . . . Freedom isn't enough, Kit. You need something else."

"What?" he demanded.

"I don't know. Maybe only luck. . . . You didn't mean any harm to Lucia. Lots of people have affairs and no harm comes of it. . . . And lots of women would only laugh at Leila. But I—— Oh, I know I'm a rotten little coward, but I wouldn't dare even be your mistress now. It—it all looked different, when I thought there was only you, by yourself. . . . No, no, Kit; please let me go. It's no use. I'm afraid. . . . You'd better go back to Heliopolis and fix things up at the factory. Then, if you want to come back to New York——"

"You'll be waiting for me?"

"Oh, my God, I wish I could say yes. But I'd be afraid. No, Kit, I'm going away. And if you want to do a good deed—good for yourself, too—you'd better marry Lucia. She's worth about twenty of me."

"Lucia!" he growled. Then, as she opened the

door—— "Anita, you're half crazy now. Don't make this final. Think it over. Then telephone me—an hour from now, to-morrow morning, whenever you like. I'll be waiting."

"It's no use," she warned him from the doorway. "I just can't——"

But he waited—an hour, two hours. She loved him; even after her interview with Lucia, she'd decided she needed him more than freedom. She'd feel that way again, as soon as she had got over the shock of Leila. . . . Lucia, now—the reflection dragged a mirthless chuckle from him—Lucia could have got along with Leila; she wouldn't even have aroused Leila's suspicion. Anita, whose eight years of chaste widowhood must be almost a record, for her age and class, had looked to Leila like a bad woman; but Lucia would look, even to Leila, like the sort of woman a prosperous widower sought in honorable marriage. That would have settled all his problems. . . . Only, he didn't want Lucia. He wanted the girl who had told him, only two hours ago, that whatever happened to him happened to her too. Surely she'd call him up——

But the hours dragged on, while he paced up and down, smoking cigar after cigar; till at last, when he had all but abandoned hope, the telephone rang. He reached it in a leap, snatched it up——

"Hello! . . . Oh! Lucia!"

She felt she had to apologize, she said, to him and to Anita, for the utterly unforgivable thing she'd done this afternoon. She couldn't imagine why she had behaved so badly, but she'd never do it again. She was

dreadfully fond of them both, and hoped they'd be wonderfully happy. She hoped, too, that they'd let her see them occasionally; really, she'd be good after this. She had telephoned Anita a while ago to ask if they wouldn't both come to tea with her to-morrow, in token of forgiveness; and Anita had said that she was busy to-morrow, but she was sure he would be glad to come——

Lucia loved endless telephone conversations at midnight, talking from her bed after the rest of the house was asleep. Sometimes she had talked to him for an hour at a time, in the old days when he was fond enough of her to stand it. To-night he stood it because he was too listless and dispirited to shut her off; and as he listened to her ceaseless murmur, he could hear the distant baying of the bloodhounds closing in.

AMATEUR

THE days are gone when graduates of Katonka University had to explain just what and where that institution was. A million-dollar stadium, a dozen costly fraternity houses, at least one player mentioned every year for somebody's All-American football team, a professor publicly discharged for advocating the birth control that other professors merely practise (if you want to know why they practise it, look at the salary list)—these bright and varied glories have put old Katonka on the map. But the fairest jewel in alma mater's crown is that loyal alumnus, United States Senator Chester Balestier.

In the Senate, Balestier is no commanding figure; when he rises to speak the Press Gallery empties, and Senators drift out to the cloakrooms to tell stories till he has said his say. But the orations delivered to the empty desks go out to every one of his constituents (printing and postage free), and the State Committee praises them in boiler-plate editorials furnished to the country press. Of the hundreds of bills he has introduced, and log-rolled into the statute books, none lives in history as the Balestier Act; but every one lives in the memory of some grateful voter, who got what he wanted and won't forget who got it for him.

So the experts will tell you that Balestier is likely to reach the White House before he is through. No man in public life has more of that priceless quality that politicians call availability—the thing to which tired, bleary-eyed men, assembled in a smoke-filled room to pick a presidential candidate, turn gratefully as the last day of the convention begins to dawn. They don't ask, "What has he done?"; they ask, "What is there against him?" There is nothing against Balestier; he has no enemies, and never will have if he can help it. "One thing is sure," said an old newspaper man one night when a group at the National Press Club was discussing his presidential prospects. "If they resurrected George Washington to run against him, Balestier would carry every state in the union."

They are proud of him for all that at old Katonka; but they are grateful to him too. For he was the first man who put Katonka on the map. Before he ever went into politics he had fought his way into the semi-finals of the national tennis championship; and before that, he was the first Katonka man ever mentioned for the All-American football team, in the old days when Walter Camp picked it, and no man dared to pick another. So Balestier can count on the whole-hearted loyalty of every man who ever went to old Katonka, and of every woman but one.

But what Katonka owes him is little enough, beside what he owes Katonka. He'll tell you that himself. . . .

Back in the 'nineties Katonka was small, poor, and unknown; most of its students were an uncouth lot,

but it had seldom had a less promising recruit than Chet Balestier. He came up from Roundstown, large and raw, immensely earnest and immensely shy. He was earnest because he was the son of a widow, who by thrift and industry had brought him up and saved a little money to start him in college; and he had come to Campusville resolved to work his way through, to study hard and make his mother proud of him, and to avoid such costly and time-consuming diversions as fraternities and football.

He avoided fraternities by unanimous consent. As for football, nobody in that end of the state had ever heard of Chet's exploits on the town team back home—least of all the eastern coach whom old Jarvis Cushing, Katonka's one rich alumnus, had hired to break a long tradition of athletic disaster. For the first fortnight nobody seemed to know that Chet Balestier was in college at all. And then one afternoon, as he was crossing the campus, Dan Hawley spoke to him.

All Dan Hawley wanted was Chet's vote for his candidate for the presidency of the Athletic Association. Dan never ran for a college office himself; he had too many enemies. Besides, he got more fun out of pulling the wires. He elected most of the class presidents and athletic managers, and in that small college he couldn't afford to overlook a single vote. But before he could talk politics to Chet Balestier he had to do a lot of listening.

For Dan Hawley was a senior, a campus celebrity, a Delta Rho. When he noticed the unknown and homesick freshman, Chet simply turned his soul up-

side down and emptied it, while Dan patiently strolled along with him, muttering an occasional "I see." The substance of what he saw was that college life cost more than Chet had expected, and he hadn't been able to find a job to pay part of his expenses. In the little college town, all jobs were already bespoken. So at the end of the first term he meant to leave Katonka and enter the state university, where jobs were more numerous and tuition was free.

"Some fellows down home tried to get me to go there," he told Dan Hawley. "Lots of Roundstown fellows go to State. But my mother wanted me to go to a church college——"

"Roundstown?" Hawley interrupted. And then—"Balestier! . . . Good Lord, are you the Balestier that played half-back for the Roundstown Bears? Nobody up here ever heard of that team, but I've seen you play; I come from down state too. Why aren't you out at football practise?"

"I won't have time for football. I promised my mother I wouldn't play."

"I see," said Dan, whistling softly. "But look here, Balestier—you said you wanted to work your way through college. Have you tried to get one of those student-watchman jobs?"

"I never heard of them," Chet confessed.

"They've just been started this year. Till this year all these college buildings, representing an investment of maybe a quarter of a million dollars, have had just one night watchman to protect them. Think of that, Balestier! Think of the fire risk! Some of the alumni

got so worried about it that old Jarvis Cushing donated a fund to employ fifteen student watchmen. The job pays ten dollars a week——"

"Gosh!" Chet exploded. In those days you could live like a lord at Katonka on ten dollars a week. "Do you suppose I could get a job like that?"

"I can speak to Mr. Cushing about it," Dan promised briskly. "And as that's night work, you'd have your afternoons free for football."

"Oh, I couldn't play football, Hawley. I'll have to study hard——"

"That's all right. All this job would amount to is that you'd lie around somewhere in the college buildings from supper time till midnight. You could do all your studying then."

"But I promised my mother——"

"Now look, Balestier, you want to do what's best for your mother, don't you? If you could pay all your expenses here in college, think what a load you'd take off her shoulders."

"Oh, of course if I could get that job everything would be fine. But I won't have time for football if I keep up with my studies the way I ought."

"Well——" Dan Hawley shrugged. "Any man in college would be glad to have one of those jobs. I certainly couldn't recommend a man who didn't show the right kind of college spirit."

"Oh!" Chet's eyes widened. "I see. I don't get the job unless I play football. . . . I don't like that, Hawley. It isn't honest."

"Honest? . . . See here, freshman, we aren't hiring anybody to play football. Don't you get anything like that into your head. We only feel that protecting the college buildings is a privilege that shouldn't be given to a man who hasn't proved his loyalty to old Katonka."

Dan paused. Chet's face was working in agonized indecision.

"Tell you what," said Dan. "You think it over, and I'll speak to Mr. Cushing to-night. For all I know, all these jobs are filled."

"Oh, gosh!" Chet groaned. "I hope not. . . . If it would help when you speak to Mr. Cushing, I've got a letter of recommendation from my pastor——"

"I'll tell him that," Dan promised. "It certainly would help."

Jarvis Cushing had been born in Campusville, and had gone forth from Campusville; and had come back, after selling his factories to the trust for two million dollars, to devote his declining years to the bringing up of his motherless daughter, and the putting of old Katonka on the map. Dan Hawley was his chief lieutenant in the student body; old Jarvis liked Dan's cool clear-headedness. If Nesta Cushing were only old enough to marry—— But Nesta was twelve, and a placid coed named Miriam Fuller was wearing Dan's fraternity pin. At that age they don't know the kind of woman they're going to need, old Jarvis was reflecting while Dan told him about Chet Balestier.

"Huh!" said Cushing at last. "I don't mind hiring

players to come to college, but I'm damned if I like to hire a man to come out for the team when he's here already."

"He's worth it," Dan promised. "He'll just about double the power of that back-field."

"Don't like all these scruples of his, either. He acts as if he was doing us a favor."

"He's a good kid, Mr. Cushing—just green." Already Dan felt the beginnings of a queer affection—the half-contemptuous, half-envious affection of the clever little man for the slow-witted big man—that was to shape and color all his life. "I think he'll listen to reason, after he's thought it over."

So old Jarvis nodded reluctantly, and next morning Dan told Chet that one more night watchman was to be employed.

"And you could get the job," he added, "if you showed your loyalty to old Katonka. . . . But of course," he sighed, "if you promised your mother——"

"Well," said Chet slowly, "I didn't exactly promise. . . ."

Thus began the rise of Chester Balestier.

II

The rise of Katonka University began the next Saturday, when he crashed through the line of an ancient rival for the winning touch-down while the stands roared a rhythmic "Rah! Rah! Balestier!" That was music he had never heard before, and never forgot afterward. And it worked no less powerfully on his

mother when he brought her up to Campusville to see the state university game, and let Dan Hawley explain to her that a promise made in ignorance of the circumstances couldn't be called a promise.

Dan told her about college loyalty, but it wasn't Dan that persuaded her. It was Jarvis Cushing, the wealthy Mr. Jarvis Cushing, who sat beside her in the grandstand and howled himself hoarse when Chet beat the state university almost single-handed. And on Mrs. Balestier's other side little Nesta Cushing was jumping up and down and screaming, "Go on, Chet Balestier!" . . . Chet's mother knew the child would inherit millions; by the time the boy was old enough to think of marrying——

Lost in golden visions, Mrs. Balestier was undisturbed by the news that her son had pledged to that expensive fraternity, Delta Rho.

Three years later Dan Hawley had graduated from law school and married his Miriam, Nesta Cushing had gone East to school, and old Katonka had doubled in size and wealth. Balestier, All-Western half-back, who had got his alma mater's name into the New York papers, was the most famous college student in six states, and every schoolboy knew that he was working his way through. In other colleges stout linesmen and fleet backs had been exposed as ringers and disqualified just before crucial games, thanks to quiet investigations about which Dan Hawley knew more than he ever told; but no one had ever impugned the integrity of old Katonka's student watchmen.

Their jobs paid twenty dollars a week now, but

as Katonka prospered college life had grown more costly; Chet Balestier was never quite able to make both ends meet without help from his mother. When she died, at the end of his junior year, she left barely enough money to bury her.

"But don't worry about that," said old Jarvis Cushing when Chet came back from the funeral. "If you need more money than your salary you can have it. I'll take your note, just for the looks of the thing."

"I don't like to be in debt," said Chet, frowning. "I've always worked my way." And then, drawing a long breath—"Anyway, Mr. Cushing, I've decided to go East for my senior year."

"East?" Cushing exploded. "Where?" Chet named an old and famous university; suppose we call it Colonial. Old Jarvis glowered at him. "But you're captain of the team!" he cried.

"Yes, but—I'll never make the All-American out here. Camp never gives more than one place to the colleges west of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and I'm afraid Heston's going to get it. But at Colonial——"

"You'd probably make it," Cushing conceded. "But what's our team going to do without you? Haven't you got any loyalty?"

"I think I've done a good deal for old Katonka," said Chet with some hauteur.

Jarvis Cushing snorted.

"You can't play for Colonial till a year from next fall. Transfer students have to wait. How are you going to support yourself there for two years? Borrow money?"

"I can earn my way. Some of their alumni talked to me about it last winter. I'm to room with a man—a very fine fellow—who has the advertising concession for the football programs. It's worth six or eight thousand a year, but it's too big a job for him to handle alone. He wants me to help him out. We'll split fifty-fifty."

Jarvis Cushing laughed morosely.

"Those Easterners aren't pikers," he admitted. "When they want something they're willing to pay for it. . . . Well, damn you, if you're up at auction——"

"Auction!" Chet sprang toward him, his fists clenched. Then—"I can't strike an old man," he said coldly, and walked out.

It was Dan Hawley, of course, who brought them together again.

"Mr. Cushing wants to apologize," he told Chet next day. (There was nothing Jarvis Cushing wanted less, but Dan had made him see that he had to apologize.) "He understands the situation and he wants you to stay here. He practically owns the Central Securities Company up in the city, and he'll give you a job as bond salesman this summer."

"I never sold bonds," Chet protested. "I don't believe I could." (He was young, when those craven words fell from his lips.)

"Boy, you can't help it. They'll give you all the set-ups—sure sales, sure commissions. Any man that's going to buy bonds at all will jump at the chance to buy them from the best-known football player west of Ann Arbor. You can't lose."

"I'd lose my chance for the All-American. I'd make it at Colonial."

"No, you wouldn't," said Dan smoothly. "Colonial has some rivals who'd like to know how Colonial teams are recruited. If you go there I'll tell them, and you'll never dare put on a football suit."

Chet glared at him; but he knew that when Dan had thought a thing out there was nothing you could do about it.

"Those Colonial fellows will be pretty sore," he offered in a last despairing endeavor. "If they find out that I'm getting a lot of money for staying at Katonka——"

"You're not, my boy, you're not. You're earning an honest living as a bond salesman. Who could object to that?"

"I suppose it looks all right," Chet conceded.

"Of course it does. And if it looks all right it is all right. . . . And you'll make more than money by staying here. Right now you're the hero of this state. I've played around in politics enough to learn that you can cash in on that, when the time comes. Some day we'll send you to Congress—the Sportsmen's Candidate."

So Chet moved from Roundstown to the flourishing city of Centropolis, the state capital; and that summer he made four thousand dollars as commission on his sales of bonds.

Also, that summer, he played in the state tennis tournament.

III

Every country town, in those days when golf was still a fad of effete Easterners, and the movie, the automobile, and the radio were yet to come, had some sport by which the inhabitants beguiled their leisure time; in which such inhabitants as had nothing but leisure time were apt to attain an unholy proficiency. Usually it was baseball, sometimes it was horseshoe pitching; but in Chet's home town, by some accident, it was tennis. He was the champion of Roundstown; at college he could beat anybody else in love sets. But no western colleges had tennis teams in those days, so his tennis was practically wasted; he got nothing out of it but recreation. Till that state tournament.

The Centropolis club managed to attract that year an Easterner who ranked in the First Ten—the most important player who had ever appeared on those courts. He loafed through to the final round, and there Chet Balestier beat him. Thanks to that Chet was invited to play in three other Middle Western tournaments before the summer was over. Having done so well in the bond business, he decided he could afford what it would cost; and discovered with delighted amazement that it cost him practically nothing. Quite the contrary, in fact.

He lived for tennis, and on tennis, for the next three summers.

In the winter he still sold bonds, but his sales fell off after he graduated from college and no longer

appeared in football head-lines. Presently he was recalled to a desk job with the securities company, decorative but far from profitable. He bore it for a time in silent fortitude, and then spoke to Dan Hawley; and Dan spoke to Jarvis Cushing.

"Well, what about it?" Cushing grunted. "He's no salesman. Doesn't he expect ever to work for his keep?"

"He earns his keep," Dan observed. "He's the best advertisement this state ever had, so far as sports go—and they're going farther every year. We can afford to take care of him."

"Oh, all right, all right. But I don't see why I always have to give the party."

"We might let you off this time," said Dan thoughtfully. "There's that real-estate development of Findlay's on the North Side. The new tennis club will boost values out that way. I think Findlay might carry Chet for a block of lots, if you put it up to him in the right way."

"I'll do it," old Jarvis sighed. "But I begin to see the difference between a professional and an amateur. The professional comes cheap." Then, more cheerfully—"How's that boy of yours, Danny?" Dan Hawley grinned widely.

"Finest boy in the world, Mr. Cushing. We hope for another in May."

"More power to you," said old Jarvis, silently wishing that Dan Hawley's sons were his grandsons.

Nesta, then, had just finished her freshman year at Katonka. That summer Jarvis Cushing died suddenly.

Even in what he called retirement he had taken such good care of his money that he could leave a million to old Katonka and a quarter of a million to Dan Hawley, and still have two or three million left for Nesta.

Chet Balestier hadn't seen her for years; but at her father's funeral he couldn't keep his eyes off her. The child had grown up—a golden blonde, terrifically effective in black, with a slim tense figure that suggested a throttled eagerness. Chet decided that he had been neglecting old Katonka since he graduated; he'd run down to Campusville this fall and see some football games.

On the night after Katonka beat the state university there was a dinner dance at the Theta house. Nesta hadn't danced since her father's death, but she made an exception for Chet Balestier. He had six dances with her in a row; then they strolled out into the crisp smoky autumn night.

"It's a great team," she sighed. "But there's nobody on it like you, Chet. I remember the first game you played in, seven years ago. You tumbled Sir Launcelot off his pedestal that day, and I never put him back."

He looked into her eyes—they were passing under a street lamp—and his heart jumped as he saw that she wasn't joking. Adolescent hero worship—but she was nineteen now; it might not last much longer. . . . They passed into the shadow, and Chet kissed her, for no other reason than that he wanted to kiss her and she wanted him to. He remembered that motivation

later, with some pride; for instant afterthought had reminded him that he couldn't live forever on the profit of those North Side lots, and that Nesta Cushing had two or three million dollars.

The next week-end he went down to Campusville, not to see a football game but to see Nesta. He stayed, of course, at the Delta Rho house; it was a little crowded this year, and Campusville had an excellent new hotel. But the brothers were proud to entertain their most distinguished alumnus, and Chet Balestier, who had never paid a hotel bill in his life, didn't see why he should begin now. In the back of his mind, unacknowledged, was a suspicion that if he had come courting Nesta while her father lived old Jarvis would have kicked him out. But her father was dead; and nobody kicked him out of the Theta house, though he and Nesta sat two hours in the parlor with the lights turned low after everybody else had obeyed the house rules and gone to bed.

In February she left college, and they were married. While they were on the honeymoon the ruling powers of the Central Securities Company held conference.

"You can't keep the husband of the heaviest stockholder in a job that pays fifty dollars a week," the president sighed. "Yet it's more than he's worth."

"His athletic following still counts for something," the chairman of the board objected. "If we could make him an extra vice-president with no duties in particular——"

"I think you'd better," said Dan Hawley smoothly. (Dan was general counsel for the company now.)

"He'll be too busy to work at his job, anyway, after I've put him into politics. Make him a vice-president; and if you can't figure out how to make the Cushing interest pay his salary, come around to me and I'll show you."

So Chet came back from his bridal journey to find himself a prominent financier. He enjoyed the glamour of that position so much that he was uninterested when Dan Hawley began to talk politics.

"Nobody'd ever vote for a minion of the money power," Chet protested. But Dan shook his head.

"You're wrong, boy. This muckraking game has been overdone and people are about ready for a change. Besides, you're not a minion of the money power. You're a self-made young man who turns his back on the pursuit of wealth to devote himself to public service. I'm going to run you for Congress this fall. Old Laidlaw's held the seat for twenty years and everybody's tired of him. They'll jump at a chance to vote for a young man—especially a young man who almost made the All-American, and went to Newport and beat tennis players from New York and Philadelphia, to the greater glory of Centropolis."

Chet was beginning to think better of his reluctance, but he insisted that he must talk it over with his wife. Nesta, to his astonishment, was enthusiastic; so Chet accepted the nomination, delivered with commanding presence the speeches that Dan Hawley wrote for him, and was not in the least surprised when in November Centropolis gave a huge majority to Chester Balestier, the Sportsmen's Candidate.

IV

A new man can't expect to make much of a dent in the House of Representatives, and Chet's first term was made no easier by his wife. She seemed to think he could reform the world overnight. Even when Dan Hawley explained to her how necessary it was to play along with the organization, she acted as if what was true for ordinary men didn't apply to Chet. But after the first year or two Nesta stopped expecting so much, or at least stopped talking about it. And if Congressman Balestier was a figure of no great consequence in the House, he bulked considerably larger when he went to New York to speak at dinners of the leaders of amateur sport.

"You're doing fine," said Dan Hawley. "Every time they give you a cheer in New York the echo amplifies it back home. One term as Governor, and then the Senate."

"Governor?" Chet gasped. "I couldn't get the nomination."

So far as the record goes, it was the last time he ever doubted his ability to get anything.

"Leave that to me," said Dan Hawley.

"I don't know what I'd ever do without you," Chet confessed humbly.

And that, too, so far as is recorded, he never said again.

"Well, old-timer," said Dan Hawley, "I couldn't have done much without you. I've got some ideas

about the way things ought to be done, but so many people hate me that I couldn't be elected dog-catcher. And since you and I happen to think so much alike about affairs of state——"

He said it solemnly; and Chet Balestier was never one to probe for grins that didn't appear on the surface.

Dan got him the nomination, and the mistakes of his opponent got him the governorship. (Chet made no mistakes because he took no positions and did nothing.) If some few people suspected that Governor Balestier was the front and Dan Hawley the works, they never said so. His two-year term was uneventful, except for the trolley strike in Centropolis that for three days kept the city in an uproar. "Order must be restored!" the Governor proclaimed in ringing tones, and slipped away to talk to Dan Hawley.

"Call out the militia? You're crazy!" Dan snapped. "Suppose they do burn a few street-cars and smash a few windows. What you want to do——"

The next day the leaders of the union and the heads of the trolley company were called to the Governor's office. Chet Balestier, ex-All-Western half-back, who could have licked any two of them in a rough-and-tumble, locked the door and told them they would stay there till the strike was settled. Within two hours the strikers had got the wage increase they demanded; within two months the trolley company lifted the fare from five cents to eight, with the approval of Governor Balestier's Public Service Commission. This covered the wage increase and a little more, but by that

time Centropolis was rolling with easy money brought in by war orders, and people who would have felt the increase in trolley fares a year ago never noticed it now.

That fall the solid labor vote and the solid (though silent) banking influence combined to send Governor Balestier to the Senate.

Back in Washington, with the more dignified position and longer tenure of a Senator, Chet breathed a great sigh of relief. He and Nesta both liked the town, and his service in the lower House had enabled them to make friends—the right sort of friends. Nesta's fortune had trebled in war industries; she bought a big house on Meridian Hill, and presently people who had ignored her husband were beginning to pay attention to him in the hope of being invited to her dinners.

A new Senator can break into the papers easily enough, but breaking into the inner circle is another matter. Chet, whose resonant voice had broadcast Dan Hawley's ideas to a thousand political rallies, had the wisdom to realize that deeds, not words, were what counted now. He voted with the party on partisan issues; non-partisan issues had a happy way of coming to a vote when he was out of town making an after-dinner speech. He was in New York, addressing a thousand diners on the topic, "Amateur Sport Will Win the War," when the Eighteenth Amendment passed the Senate; he was sick in bed (by Dan Hawley's advice) when the Volstead Act was passed; but he cast his vote (also by Dan's advice) to repass it over Wilson's veto, after a ringing speech that

proclaimed his devotion to moral principles. His wife, fortunately, was able to buy up a hundred thousand dollars' worth of wines and liqueurs before the act went into force.

They had settled down, Chet used to reflect comfortably, to the placidity of a happy marriage; she never bothered him any more about visionary reforms. She didn't go with him on his after-dinner speaking trips, as she had done in the first year of their marriage; but she never complained of his frequent absences. The one flaw in their happiness was that they had no children.

Dan Hawley and his Miriam by this time had four. Dan adored them and so did Miriam, but the third side of the triangle was missing; Dan and Miriam no longer adored each other. For the children's sake they never formally separated; but Dan spent more and more time in Washington, where he had a good deal of law business by now. The failure of his marriage had soured him, but when he was with Chet and Nesta he recovered his old quizzical good humor. There were other people in Washington who seemed able to cheer him up—women he didn't introduce to Nesta when she happened to meet him in their company.

"He ought to have more sense!" Chet fumed when his wife told him of one of these chance encounters. "It's outrageous!"

"Is it?" said Nesta moodily. "Pathetic, if you like; he can't get much real companionship from women like that. Miriam's led him a rotten life; he needs sympathy and understanding. . . . Like the rest of us."

"Maybe he does, but first thing you know one of these gold diggers will shake him down——" Nesta cut him off with a laugh.

"Oh, so that's what's worrying you! Cheer up. I don't think any gold digger will ever get the best of Dan Hawley."

None the less Senator Balestier, that loyal if frequently non-resident husband, felt his moral sense affronted by Dan's irregularities. But he grew more broad-minded after he became acquainted with Madame Madura.

V

He met her first at one of Nesta's dinners. Esteban Madura had come to Washington to smooth the way for a loan, which his Latin-American fatherland had failed to get, so far, because two oil companies were deadlocked over the concessions that went with it. Two days after the dinner Inez Madura invited Senator Balestier of the Foreign Relations Committee to tea, alone. And after that——

They were prudent—they had to be; but even so they might not have escaped detection if Nesta, while their affair was at its height, had not been making a long visit back home in Centropolis; and if Esteban Madura had not been preoccupied by affairs of state. The oil company that seemed likely to lose the concession had financed a revolution which turned Madura's party out; and he and his wife were marooned in Washington. Virtually penniless, Inez confessed at

last with shuddering sobs. Naturally Chet insisted on her accepting a loan to tide them over; and then another, and another. . . .

Six months later, while Nesta was visiting in Chicago, Chet made a hasty trip back to Centropolis to see Dan Hawley.

"Dan, I've got to have money. A hundred thousand. Quick."

"Well," said Dan rather coldly, "you've got that much, haven't you?"

"No. I never had that much. Nesta always pays the household expenses. And I had some bad luck in the market last year that pretty nearly cleaned me out."

"Senators shouldn't have bad luck in the market," said Dan. "It shows culpable negligence. . . . Well, if you haven't got the money, Nesta would lend it to you."

"Nesta?" Chet groaned. "Oh my God! . . . Dan, it's for Inez Madura. She and her husband have been bleeding me for months—both of them, working together. If you knew how near I've come to killing that woman——"

"Senators can't afford to be indicted for murder."

"Nor sued for alienation either. Madura will ruin me if I don't come through. But if I do they'll get out —go to Paris. You've got to get me the money."

Dan Hawley's eyes were chill as Chet had never seen them.

"I haven't got it, Chet. And this time I can't raise it."

"Why not?" Chet demanded in a frenzy.

"For—well, call them personal reasons. This time, boy, you've got to find your own exit."

Spurred by extremest need, Chet found it. His old friend Harry Summers, the oil man, whose group was just now promoting a counter-revolution in Madura's fatherland, carried Chet in a venture on the stock market without even asking for his note; in due time he gave Chet the profit—thousand-dollar bills passed from coat pocket to coat pocket in Summers's suite at the Willard—and Chet breathed easily again. His vote made a majority of one in the Foreign Relations Committee for the treaty that gave Summers's group the oil concessions.

Nesta had come home; and Chet, who for months had been nervous, constrained, ashamed in his relations with her, felt that their old harmony was coming back. But one night, when she returned from a dinner which public business had prevented him from attending, she came to his study, cold and purposeful.

"Chet, what's this deal you were in with Harry Summers?"

"How did you know?" he asked, his face turning gray.

"He told me this evening. He'd had too much champagne, and he said he'd supposed of course I knew about it. Which means, I suppose, that he wanted to be sure I did know, with that treaty coming to a vote to-morrow. He swore he'd told nobody else, and he never will; I'm sure of that. He knows you never can tell what a jury may do. . . . But—— Oh, Chet,

why didn't you come to me for the money?" Senator Balestier swallowed, tried to speak. "I don't care what it was for," she told him desperately. "I wouldn't have asked you what it was for——"

By now he had collected himself.

"What it was for? Just an ordinary speculation, my dear. I wouldn't have wanted to make it with your money."

"So you made it with Harry Summers's money. And that treaty——"

"I was going to vote for that treaty anyway. . . . My God, Nesta, you're not implying there's anything wrong about this, are you?"

"No, darling, of course not. But suppose it got into the papers."

"How can it? Nobody knows but us three. Besides," said Senator Balestier comfortably, "the old muckraking days are over. The papers have a new attitude, a healthier attitude, toward the affairs of government. They know the difference between public business and private business."

"So they do," his wife agreed. "And isn't it lucky?"

"Look here, there's nothing wrong about this!" he stormed. "A man can't give his whole life to public service, and still have money enough to live on the scale his position requires. If his friends want to help him—why, it's no more than your father did for me in college. He didn't pay me to come to college and play football; he only made it possible for me to do what I wanted to do, and show my loyalty to old Katonka. . . . Now don't you worry about this. No-

body's going to find out; and even if they did, there's nothing they could take hold of. Everybody knows I'm for the treaty and everybody knows I and Harry Summers are old friends. So long as nobody talks about this stock market deal, it looks all right. And as Dan's so fond of saying, if it looks all right it is all right."

"I suppose so," said Nesta. Then, after a long silence—"By the way, I've decided to take that round-the-world cruise that all those Centropolis people are going on—the Bogarduses and Mrs. Weeks, and Dan Hawley."

VI

Nesta was the only woman Chet had ever really loved; he knew that from the way, the countless ways, he missed her. Other women, he supposed, might have consoled some aspects of his loneliness; women he passed on the street, saw in hotel lobbies, met at dinners, in New York or Washington; women his eyes followed for a moment, speculative. . . . But he was through with all that; never again in his life would he get himself mixed up with another woman. It wasn't right; it wasn't patriotic, for a statesman ought to set an example in secret as well as in public. And it would be disloyal to Nesta whom he loved, who was coming back to him. . . .

This restoration of his moral balance was immensely soothing; more soothing yet was the fact that he would

go into the National Convention as the favorite son of his state. This time the President was sure to be renominated, and Senator Balestier could hope for no more than a complimentary vote on the first ballot. But four years from now, with the President shelved, a little luck might bring the nomination to Chet Balestier. . . . And all this while Dan Hawley was cruising around the world! They'd all realize, now, that he could do without Dan Hawley.

He went to New York to meet Nesta at the end of the cruise. It happened that he was to speak there that night, at a dinner of the Association of University Presidents, on "Amateur Sport, the Backbone of Character." It would be one more stone built into the pyramid of his nation-wide reputation; yet when he met Nesta on the pier he had wild dreams of telephoning the chairman of the dinner committee and telling him that he was too ill to speak. It seemed stupidly wasteful to spend even a few hours away from Nesta.

She had always seemed younger than her years, thanks to the slenderness of the sterile woman; but now with a new sparkle in her eyes, the flush of health and zest and vigor under tropic tan, she looked ten years younger than when she went away. Senator Balestier was as nervous, as awestricken, as humbly eager as a love-sick schoolboy; he had no time for more than a nod and a "see-you-later" for Dan Hawley. . . . In their hotel suite, freed at last from the assiduities of servants, he turned hungrily to his wife.

"No," she said with level indifference. "I don't want you to make love to me."

"Tired?" he asked. But he felt a premonitory shudder.

"Not in the least. I'm in love with another man."

The next three minutes were a nightmare. He flung questions at her in hysterical horror; and she answered him, completely candid. Even the things she told him hurt less than her listless unconcern at what he felt about them. But the facts were bad enough. She had been in love with this man for almost a year; she had been his mistress since the second day of the round-the-world cruise. . . . And the man was Dan Hawley. For a moment Chet was dumb with sheer astonishment.

"I know it doesn't seem reasonable," she admitted. "I've known him since I was ten years old and I didn't fall in love with him till I was nearly forty. But I don't intend to give him up now."

"You mean you want me to divorce you so that you can marry him? I certainly won't!"

"No, darling, we're putting no such strain on your generosity. Dan's crazy about his children; if Miriam divorced him she'd keep them and wouldn't let him see them any more than she could help. So that's out. . . . But she wouldn't divorce him unless we drove her to it; Dan's always been very generous with her. She wouldn't live so well on alimony."

"But—but what do you mean to do, then?" he stammered. She looked at him with the steady impenetrable eyes of old Jarvis Cushing.

"We're going on," she said. "As we are. . . . Don't worry. We'll be circumspect."

Then he broke down; and it measured the change that Nesta's six months' absence, and the acid memory of Inez Madura, had worked in him that at first he said nothing but that he loved her, he needed her, he couldn't live without her——

Bored, she interrupted him at last.

"I suppose I ought to be sorry for you, Chet. You're making rather a show of yourself, but I don't blame you; I know how you feel. You see, I felt the same thing for years. About you."

"About me?" he repeated. She blazed in sudden bitterness.

"Yes, you! I was wild about you when we were married—and for years afterward. I was only nineteen, and I'd been crazy about you ever since I was twelve. You could have made anything out of me. . . . But you didn't care enough to try."

"Nesta, I never looked at another woman——"

"Possibly not, then. You were too busy looking in the mirror. . . . As for me—well, you took me when you wanted me, and laughed at my silly notions about what my hero could do, and left me to grow up by myself. Which I did. It takes time to kill the sort of adoration I felt for you, but you succeeded, my dear. You succeeded."

"Well, suppose I did——" He blustered, to hide a queasy hollow ache. "Do you mean to sit there and tell me that you intend to go right on with this affair? What do you think I'll be doing?"

"Not a thing," she said. "Any more than I did when you were having your affair with Madame Madura." His jaw dropped.

"Did Dan tell you about that? The dirty——"

"No!" she said scornfully. "He didn't need to tell me. Everybody in Washington knew about it; and most of them told me—as if I hadn't seen it for myself. You won't have to stand what I stood, at any rate. Dan and I will be discreet."

"Discreet?" he roared. "Do you think I'm going to let my wife go on having an affair with another man, under my roof?"

"My roof," she corrected amiably. "I bought it, I furnished it, I pay the taxes and the grocer's bills. And I choose to let you go on living under my roof, as you've lived for twenty years—so long as you don't annoy me. But if you do, out you go. . . . Besides, darling," she reminded him, "this is a moral nation. A prominent statesman can't afford to be even the plaintiff in a divorce suit so scandalous as this one might be. And of course if you made any trouble, I'd file a counter suit against you, naming Madame Madura. That would finish you."

"Finish me?" Chet Balestier was becoming himself again. "But, good God! This will finish me anyway. . . . And I might have been President!" he moaned.

"I told you that Dan and I would be careful. . . . And I promise you this—when you start your campaign for delegates to the National Convention next time I'll take a vacation from Dan; and if you're nom-

inated for the presidency I'll give him up. Permanently."

"You would?" he cried with resurgent hope. "Then you still love me?" She looked at him blankly. "If you'd do that for me——" he explained. She laughed.

"For you? Don't be absurd; I'd do it for myself. I'd rather be the President's wife than Dan Hawley's mistress."

Now, for the first time, he hated her. . . . Also, for the first time, he felt that his mind met hers in complete understanding.

"Well, how the devil do you think either of us is going to get to the White House if you carry on an affair? Especially an affair with the man who'll be chairman of the National Committee if I'm nominated for President? Somebody's sure to find out—at least to suspect——"

"But nobody's going to tell, darling. At least—and this is what counts—nobody's going to print it, unless you're foolish enough to spread it on the record. As you told me once, the newspapers know the difference, now, between private business and public business."

"But if everybody knows it——" he protested.

"So long as they don't print it, my dear, it's going to look all right. And as you told me once, if it looks all right it is all right."

"It was Dan who said that first," he told her harshly.

"I don't doubt it. Dan said all your famous sayings first. . . . Oh, I know he's crooked. But he never fools himself, and he never tries to fool me. If you'd been like that—— But that's all over. There

was a time when I couldn't have stood a man who was candid about his crookedness; but I've grown up. . . . Well? Are you going to be sensible about it?"

"No!" he roared. "I know enough to send Dan Hawley to jail!"

"No doubt," she assented. "No doubt, also, he knows a few things about you, though he's never told them to me. Dan has his queer points of honor. But he'd tell the world if you forced him to; and I could add a few little contributions—that Summers affair, for instance. If you don't take your medicine, Chet, you're through with politics."

"I don't care if I am! I'll——"

"You don't care?" she broke in scornfully. "You'd better care! What would you do if you dropped out of politics? You never supported yourself for a day of your life! You lived on your mother, on football, on tennis; and for the last twenty years you've lived on me. If you lost your seat in the Senate you couldn't earn your keep—and your friends wouldn't carry you in stock deals, either. No, darling, you're an amateur. You can't afford to turn professional."

"Nesta—— For God's sake—— Oh, we've both made a mess of things; but if you'll drop Dan we can start again——"

"Rather late, my dear. . . . I used to wish we could start again—when we'd been married four or five years, and I began to see where we were heading. I tried to talk to you about it; but you were too busy to listen, or else you laughed at me and called me a crazy child. . . . I may be crazy now, but I'm not a child.

I'm forty years old, and I know what I want, and I mean to get it. It's too late to start again. We're what we are and we might as well take what we can." She softened a little. "Come, it's time for you to get ready for your dinner. And brace up! You ought to look your best, to-night."

Furiously he stamped out, slammed the door behind him. But in the next room he stood still, irresolute—till he heard a tiny click on the bedside telephone. It was on the same wire as hers; beyond the door, her muffled voice murmured. . . . He strode to the telephone, took off the receiver.

"Biltmore?" she was saying. "I want to speak to Mr. Daniel Hawley."

He heard Dan's "Hello"; then Nesta's voice, muted to a sensuous tenderness that her husband hadn't heard in years.

"Hello, dearest. Coming up to dinner with me? . . . Yes, of course. . . . Chet?" She laughed faintly. "Chet's dining out, I'm afraid, with the Association of University Presidents. . . . Yes, he's the speaker of the evening. He'll probably be out quite late."

Senator Balestier dropped the receiver; raging, he strode to the door. . . . She had put aside the telephone; she lay on a chaise longue, her bare arms clasped behind her head, her eyes remote, dreamy; her lips half parted in a smile.

"Nesta!" he roared. "You—— You——"

"So you listened in?" she said. "I wondered if you would. . . . Well?"

"You're going to see him here? Here?"

"We don't dare risk going out together. And we've got to be circumspect—for your sake, darling. After this I'd advise you not to listen in, if you want to preserve your peace of mind." He was scarlet with fury, his fists were clenched. "You ought to begin dressing for dinner," she told him placidly. "And for Heaven's sake pull yourself together. Try to look like the next President of the United States."

He thought he might have killed her, but for that timely reminder.

VII

At the high table, on the toastmaster's right hand, Senator Balestier sat stately, statesmanlike and serene. But behind that unfurrowed brow he was picturing, foreseeing——

No matter how discreet she and Dan might be, people would find out. Their companions on the round-the-world cruise must know, or at least suspect, already; and some of those people came from Centropolis. Presently all their friends would know; ultimately—for Washington was a small town where gossip traveled—every newspaperman would know. They would know that the man who had made Chet Balestier had taken his wife, was still taking her when he chose, making a fool of Chet Balestier under his own roof. They would know and they would snicker——

Chet hardly heard the piled-up eulogies showered on him by the toastmaster who was introducing him; all

he could hear was that vast, politely muffled snicker that would presently run all over Washington. . . . But snickers didn't kill; the day was past when a statesman could be laughed out of public life. Everybody might snicker, but nothing would get into the papers; every one might know, but it need never be publicly acknowledged—unless Chet Balestier made a fool of himself.

No use doing that. A politician couldn't afford to cherish personal grudges. He'd need Dan Hawley when it came to getting pledged delegations to the National Convention, need him still more when it came to persuading delegations pledged to other men to change their vote on the decisive ballot. And he could count on Dan; Dan's final ambition was to make a President. . . . And yet—— Nesta—— At this very moment——

The toastmaster finished; Senator Balestier rose. The assembled university presidents were stirred by the unmistakable sincerity in his resonant voice:

"Mr. Toastmaster, and gentlemen! All that I am to-night I owe to my alma mater."

UNGRACIOUS LADY

MRS. STURDEVANT used to console herself with the conviction that she and Charles quarreled no more than the average married pair, even if no less. Undeniably the habit seemed to be growing on them, but that might be only because they had more things to quarrel over now—the children's friends and the children's future, and money. In the three-room flat on Tenth Street money had been a rarity, to be received with glad astonishment; in the twelve-room duplex on Eighty-sixth Street money was fairly commonplace, but Mrs. Sturdevant had discovered not only that the more you have, the more you have to spend, but that you can quarrel all the more over the ways to spend it. Charles was so visionary and impractical, sometimes. This morning, for instance. . . .

"Don't be an idiot!" she flared. "You know we can't afford it."

Over the rim of her coffee cup her gray eyes regarded her husband with a faintly scornful weariness. After fifteen years he ought to know enough not to bring up controversial topics at breakfast; at least, not till they had finished their coffee.

"We've got the money——" Charles began.

"We've got things to do with it, too. That trip would cost eight or ten thousand, if you took the chil-

dren." (The children, happily, had breakfasted earlier and set off to school before Charles brought this up.) "We couldn't go just to Stockholm," she said, "and then turn around and come home. We'd have to stop in Paris to play around with the crowd, and then come home with the crowd on the *Ile de France* or the *Berengaria.*"

"We needn't. The best crossing we ever had was on the old *Cymric,* even if she was only a one-class boat to Boston."

"We were in love." She hadn't meant to put that so definitely in the past tense, but one did things one didn't mean, before one had finished the breakfast coffee. "And young," she added. "And poor. Now all our friends and all your clients travel on the best boats—the children's school friends, too. We can't afford to be eccentric till we've put Bob and Marge through college."

"Yes, but—damn it, Joan! We don't want to miss all the fun."

"We always have fun at the Point, of summers. If you spend fifty thousand on a summer cottage you ought to get your month's worth out of it. Even with the children at camp the summer wouldn't cost us four thousand, aside from the overhead on the house. . . . And if we went abroad you'd miss that ten-thousand-dollar commission from the Grellings. We need it; and at the Point you could drive over to their place every morning to supervise the job, and still come back in time for your tennis and swimming."

"Unh!" said Charles, picking up the morning paper.

"Can't work all the time." When he retired behind the front page of the *Times* it was equivalent to asking for an armistice; Joan knew she ought to leave well enough alone. But some inner gadfly drove her on.

"You certainly can't work all the time. You're a luxury. You've made lots of money these last few years; but maybe prosperity won't last forever, and a landscape architect specializing in country estates is one of the first expenses millionaires are going to cut off in hard times. Get what you can while you can. We need it."

Charles flung aside his paper.

"We need other things too," he growled. "Maybe you don't; but I'm sick of slaving for money and then having rows over what to do with it. We're almost forty—time to enjoy things while we can. Why shouldn't we go back to Stockholm?"

Stockholm. . . . They had met there, at the Olympic Games of 1912. Joan had come to watch her brother run in the hurdles, and to forget the man back home who had jilted her for a widow with money. Charles had come up from Germany, with a brand-new diploma from a forestry school in the Odenwald, to forget the wistfully reproachful eyes of a girl at the Victoria Hotel at Heidelberg, who couldn't understand why he was too proud to live on her income. She had made him feel like a cad; he admitted that to Joan, when they were condoling with each other over their amorous misadventures. (That was three days after they met.) "I still think I was right," he

insisted. "But Ellen's too fine to see how money could make any difference."

"Fine?" said Joan scornfully. (Her brusk unsentimental directness refreshed him like cool water, after Ellen's sensitive complexities.) "She's spoiled! If she'd really wanted you she'd have understood that you had to keep your self-respect. A man with an established reputation could afford to live on an allowance from his wife, but you're just getting started. You'd be a kept man and you'd never forget it; neither would she. It's only silly sentimentality to pretend that money makes no difference."

Thus reassured, Charles ceased to feel like a cad. But he relapsed into that emotion three days later, when he stopped kissing Joan to tell her in sudden nervous despair that he didn't have five hundred dollars in the world. But she only laughed at that.

"What's money to us, darling, so long as neither of us has any?"

And so they were married. . . . Caught on the rebound, both of them; they never denied it. But what of that? They had a glorious month in a Stockholm pension, and then came home on a one-class boat to settle down and seek their fortune. . . . But that, mused Mrs. Sturdevant over her coffee, was sixteen years ago.

"We've been to Stockholm," she observed. Charles's mouth drooped with an aggrieved boyishness that was simply ridiculous, at his age.

"Well—don't you think it's about time for a second honeymoon?"

"Oh, won't you ever grow up? . . . There's no such thing as a second honeymoon. Things happen once. Haven't you any sense of anticlimax?"

"It hadn't occurred to me that it would necessarily be that," said Charles, on his dignity. (Her brusk unsentimental directness rasped his nerves fearfully.)

"I don't know what else you'd call it—dragging Bob and Marge around to the places where we used to hold hands, giving the Grand Hotel Royal an exhibition of the American husband and father on tour——"

"Damn the Grand Hotel. I'd thought of hunting up that old pension."

"Yes, you would," said his wife bitterly. "And it would serve you right if I let you. This time you'd notice the cockroaches. But Bob and Marge might not see the joke. . . . I hate sentimental journeys, Charles. Can't you live in the present?"

He rose without more words, but she knew what he refrained from saying. (One knew so many inconvenient things, after sixteen years.) He wanted to say that she didn't give him much incentive to live in the present. She wished he'd say things like that instead of just thinking them; if he blew up and abused her he'd get it off his mind. But he always swallowed his wrath and let it fester. . . . Now, from the door, he spoke.

"You win. We'll spend the summer at the Point, and I'll take that job of Grelling's. As you once reminded me, it's only silly sentimentality to pretend that money makes no difference."

. . . She had won, as usual; it might pay her to

lose occasionally. Also she was right, as usual; but that only made it worse. . . . Charles glowered from the doorway, choking down his wrath.

"Oh, say it!" she burst out. "I know what you're thinking—what you think every time we have a quarrel. You wish you'd married Ellen Hathaway. Well, so do I!"

With a grunt and a shrug he walked out; she heard the slam of the door.

II

Of course, by the time she had finished her second cup of coffee and her first cigarette she had got over wishing he had married Ellen Hathaway. She supposed he'd be over it, by lunch time. But they'd both wish it, the next time they quarreled.

Mrs. Sturdevant's morning mail lay beside her plate, but she left it unopened and lighted a second cigarette. . . . She knew women who quarreled gracefully, who made an art of it—linked quarrels and reconciliations, with the same electric force that blazed as murky hate at the beginning glowing as incandescent desire at the finish. But that sort of thing disgusted her. A good many things disgusted her; perhaps too many. . . . I suppose I'm intolerant, she reflected. All sharp corners. No grace.

She had been hurt, physically hurt, by the absurdity of Charles's idea of a middle-aged pilgrimage, dragging the children with them, to the scenes of their honeymoon fervors. But Charles couldn't see that

this revisiting would be anticlimactic; he wasn't made that way. She might have dissuaded him more graciously. Ellen Hathaway would have done it graciously—if she had done it at all. Joan suspected that Ellen would see nothing absurd in a second honeymoon.

Joan knew her; though Ellen lived in Santa Barbara she came to New York now and then, and the Sturdevants had visited her, during their winter in California while her husband was still alive. Of late years she hadn't come East, but there was a fitful correspondence which Ellen, with old-fashioned delicacy, conducted with Joan, not with Charles. That delicacy must have been bruised by Ellen's life with Brick Hathaway, who had lived in a blaze of scandal and died (on the Aisne) in a blaze of glory. No wonder Ellen had never remarried. . . . Now I, Joan mused, could have managed Brick Hathaway. . . . But she had never really wanted to manage any man but Charles, and she didn't seem to be very good at managing him. Perhaps he'd better have married Ellen, after all.

For Ellen had grace. In Heidelberg Charles had called her *"gnaedigste,"* in the German fashion; and so, his wife suspected, he still thought of her—"gracious lady." So millions of people thought of her who knew her from that Sargent portrait in the Metropolitan Museum—*Portrait of a Woman Arranging Flowers.* Ellen, tall and willowy in a clinging white gown (the picture had been painted in 1913), her graceful bare arms raised to set a bowl of poppies on the mantel; the scarlet richness of the flowers blazing beside the

shadowy black of her high-piled crown of hair. A portrait of Ellen, body and soul; for body and soul, delicate and sensitive, she was all one piece. . . . Like me, mused Mrs. Sturdevant with a shrug of her square shoulders and an impatient shake of her crisply shingled head. Only I'm built for service. . . .

But she was perceiving at last that grace might be a kind of service too. She had been immensely useful to Charles, and he knew it; but he missed the graces with which she was too proud, or too impatient, to trick out her solid merits. Charles needed a woman who saw through things, but he also needed, sometimes, a woman who wasn't too scornful of soothing illusions; he needed a wife who could check up on the tradesmen but he also needed a wife who could arrange flowers. And since what he needed was divided between two women—why, thought Joan, the laws ought to permit bigamy in a case like that. . . . She wondered, with a little dismay, if this had ever occurred to Charles. For she didn't want to share him with another woman. There were red moments of anger when she didn't want him at all; but in her lucid intervals she wanted all of him.

With an impatient shrug she swept up her mail and went to her room to dress. To please Charles, she often breakfasted in the Chinese pajamas he had given her for Christmas. Curious that his eye, so exact in its appraisal of the artistic value of trees and lawns, of shrubs and flower beds, couldn't see that this costume was worse than wasted on his wife. Joan had no illusions about her rectangular athletic figure, her tanned

sportswoman's face, her hair-colored hair. That was the way she looked and she had to make the best of it; in blues and grays and greens her best was good enough. But in these pajamas she looked ridiculous. Lacquer-black satin embroidered in jade and scarlet called for a pale skin, red lips, deep black hair—like Ellen Hathaway's. . . . Perhaps that explained it, she thought with a sudden tightening of the throat; perhaps Ellen had been before his subconscious eye when he bought that present. Certainly it wasn't me, she reflected, that he was seeing across that breakfast table.

She finished dressing, began to look over her mail; and again her throat tightened, absurdly, when she saw a square blue-gray envelope addressed in Ellen's hand. Till then she hadn't realized that she'd been hoping that their fitful correspondence had ceased forever. She opened the letter——

Dear Joan:

It's been such ages since I've heard from you! Will you be surprised to learn that I'm to be your neighbor this summer? Some people who spend the winters in Santa Barbara have been singing the praises of your Point, so I've taken one of the Inn cottages for the season. From the map, I judge that's down the bay from your house; but it can't be more than three or four miles by road——

Just about that, thought Joan—by the road that slanted across the peninsula to the Grelling estate.

Charles, supervising its relandscaping, would pass Ellen's cottage twice a day. . . . For a moment, she wrestled with an insane impulse to call up the office and tell him she'd go to Stockholm after all.

But she didn't. Instead, she was presently at her writing table, beginning a letter: "Dear Ellen—I'm so delighted——"

No use running away from things.

III

It was like Ellen that she greeted Joan as an old friend and Charles as a former acquaintance. Joan knew there was no guile in that—only delicacy; but it utterly upset her plan of assuming from the start that they were a jolly comradely trinity, and it gave Charles a chance to get acquainted with Ellen all over again, instead of taking her as somebody familiar whose faults and virtues had alike been discounted long ago. . . . And serves me right, thought Joan grimly. If I've got to the point where I have to plan, to hold my husband——

There was a great deal about Ellen that wasn't guile, but worked out to the same effect. For instance that first meeting, when she came to dinner. She kissed Joan affectionately and shook hands with Charles with a cheery "Hello! You're looking splendid!" Then, turning back to Joan—"My dear! How well gray hair becomes you!"

For less than that, thought Mrs. Sturdevant behind her welcoming smile, had the lethal bullet sped to its

mark and the deadly stiletto buried itself in quivering flesh. It was no news to Joan that she was getting gray (she'd never heard of a dye that could be trusted when you were always motoring bareheaded, or swimming without a cap); but it was probably news to Charles, who never noticed alterations in a familiar picture unless somebody pointed them out. And yet, looking in her mirror later, she had to admit that her neutral-colored thatch really was improved by this silvery powdering. Perhaps Ellen had meant it honestly, after all.

Ellen wasn't getting gray; and she hadn't cut her hair. Charles perceived that with a delighted gasp; and Ellen, after a smile of acknowledgment, turned to Joan, prettily apologetic.

"Of course *you* know, Joan, that I can't get a decent hat that will fit me. I suppose I ought to have it shingled, but it's as thick as ever and it comes down almost to my knees. I simply couldn't bear to sacrifice it."

"Quite right," said Charles stoutly. "It would be a crime. Of course short hair improves most women——"

Meaning me, thought his wife, whose lanky locks had never come below her shoulder blades. When he says women he always means me. Maybe that's a compliment. . . .

"She looks wonderful!" Charles exploded when Ellen had gone. "And she must be—let's see. She was twenty-two sixteen years ago; that would make her thirty-eight now." (Not necessarily, thought Joan

uncharitably.) "But she's still slender, and not a line in her face."

"She's never had children, Charles. And always had money."

"No, she never had any children—and she wanted them, too. She's had a pretty sad life. . . . But that hair! Curious that I'd forgotten the crimson glints in it."

Mrs. Sturdevant regarded her husband with that silent awe which is evoked by the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls. . . . Yet it was like him. He had heard of henna, but he never connected it with a woman he admired. Just so, he was aware of this world's frailties; yet he persisted in believing (till the newspapers disproved it) that all the women he knew personally were chaste and all the politicians he knew personally were honest. This selective innocence sometimes infuriated his wife, but it enabled Charles to miss a great deal that would have grieved him; and if it had its disadvantages for her about whom he knew everything—why, perhaps it was her fault that he didn't know more about what was going on. If she'd dyed her hair and flirted—— But she had elected to be what she was, and it was too late to be anything else now.

Yet again and again, in the first weeks, she told herself that she was a fool to worry. She liked Ellen, with reservations; and Ellen seemed to like her. The only fault that could be found with their intimacy was that it might seem a little ostentatious to women who saw them bathing together on the Inn beach

every afternoon, and lounging on the sand till Charles returned from the Grelling estate and joined them for tea. With Charles working and the children away at camp, Joan's time was her own; it was only decent to spend it, at first, in getting Ellen acquainted. But in past years she had bathed of mornings and spent her afternoons at the golf club on the tip of the Point; she was afraid her friends might wonder at her change of habits, in view of Charles's frank admiration of Ellen.

And he wouldn't admire her, thought his wife resentfully, if she weren't Ellen. She doesn't do anything but arrange flowers. . . . Charles admired athletic women. Ellen didn't play games; she could drive a car but she didn't; at the beach she dabbled no more than thigh deep, explaining apologetically that after the surf of the Pacific she didn't care for quiet water. But why, Charles used to ask, should she be athletic? She had the best chauffeur at the Point, and such exercise as her felicitously phlegmatic constitution needed she got from occasional languid strolls across the moors. Since she didn't exercise she ate little; since she ate little she stayed thin. She was the most beautiful woman on the Point that summer, and before long she was the most popular.

For she did things, Joan realized at last; only, not the things most other women did. She sang well, she played the piano beautifully—Debussy for preference; and at the weekly dances at the Inn she waltzed and tangoed with the grace of a vanished age. That was her charm—the grace of a vanished age, a leisured

age that could afford delicacy and sentiment. Ellen was prewar, 1910 model; and men surfeited with brusk athletic women found her an irresistible novelty. . . . Especially Charles.

Walking up from the beach one afternoon to tea at Ellen's cottage the two women paused, and Charles necessarily paused with them, for some window shopping in the Arcade.

"That cerise sports frock would be lovely on you, Ellen," Joan sighed. "I'd adore it myself, if I had the skin and the hair."

"But it's so short! . . . I suppose I'm old-fashioned," Ellen confessed with a flush, "but I don't like the revealed knee."

"Why not?" asked Joan bluntly. "Not one pair of knees in a hundred is as pretty as yours. I wish I had them." Ellen's flush deepened.

"Oh—I can't help feeling that long skirts are—more womanly."

"Clinging gowns for the clinging vine," said Joan, who had been a mannish woman long before mannishness became the mode. Then, in atonement for this nervous outbreak—"I look like an ox in short skirts," she admitted. "But I'm comfortable. That's what counts."

"Still," Charles offered, "long skirts had a charm. That long white gown you wore in the Sargent portrait, Ellen, makes these modern dresses look like flour sacks."

This from Charles, who was used to lamenting that men didn't have sense enough to dress as comfortably

as women! His wife could only stare in silence. But later, when they were driving home—

"Ellen can't go on looking like that Sargent portrait forever," she observed. "And she doesn't try. She may not like short skirts, but she wears them."

"What else could she wear, now?" Charles asked unanswerably.

Still, Joan considered, it wasn't fair. Ellen, acquiescing in the mode under protest, got all the advantages of old-fashioned reticence and modern revelation. But you couldn't explain that to Charles, who had always had a complex about Ellen. So Joan said nothing when Ellen appeared at a luncheon, a few days later, in the cerise sports frock.

I'm a fool to worry, she thought savagely. . . . But she couldn't help worrying all the same, especially in those afternoons on the beach. Ellen in her black silk suit, white-belted to emphasize her slenderness, wet her knees and then retired to the shade of her beach umbrella while Joan swam. You couldn't blame Ellen for letting down that magnificent cascade of hair—all the long-haired women did it; and it might be mere chance that she had rented a scarlet umbrella, which could be blamed for any excess of crimson in the tresses that used to be shadowy black. Joan, after her swim, took a sun bath; but Charles, who had an aversion to getting sunburned on his bald spot, sat beside Ellen under the umbrella, and gradually his hands took to playing in that overflow of hair. Quite innocently, almost unconsciously—but his wife wondered if he knew he'd always had a hair fetish.

But presently Mrs. Sturdevant took to bathing in the morning and driving over to the golf club of afternoons; it would look pointed if they three were always together on the beach. So Charles, she supposed, would have his tea alone with Ellen. No reason why he shouldn't; still she had to suppress a shiver when he reported the first occasion of the sort, with suspicious promptness. Thanks to his further reports, she knew that presently he was dropping in at Ellen's cottage every afternoon on his way home.

Well, why not? she asked herself impatiently. It's my fault that we didn't go to Stockholm; and he'll get tired of a woman who can't play games with him. . . . She didn't really worry till Ellen began to take golf lessons, and bought a speedboat. The chauffeur still drove her car but she operated the speedboat herself.

IV

This time it was Ellen who reported with ostentatious promptness that she had driven the speedboat around the Point to the Grellings', and brought Charles back for tea. (He'd been coming back in one of the Grelling cars, now that Joan was driving to the golf club.) Ellen reported that twice, and then stopped reporting it. But she didn't stop doing it; twice afterward, from the green of the fourteenth hole at the tip of the Point, Joan saw the speedboat coming around from a shore where there was nowhere to go but the Grelling estate.

It came hard to Mrs. Sturdevant to admit that she was jealous; she had always despised that ignoble and stupid emotion, the more easily because she wasn't the sort of woman who felt it. Now she knew she had never felt it only because Charles had never before given her any occasion. She supposed a sensible wife would either ignore this affair, or treat it with jocular good humor; or if that was beyond her (and it was) she would try, unobtrusively, to be particularly nice to her husband. . . . Joan did try that, but awkwardly and with embarrassment; after sixteen years, it seemed as unnatural as trying to be particularly nice to herself. The effort, and her sense of its absurdity, only frayed her nerves still more; and Charles spent still more time with Ellen.

Not, Joan supposed, that he meant any harm, or Ellen either; she was only taking him on the sentimental journey his wife had denied him. But a pair of sentimentalists drifting back into the reminiscent past were apt to wake up suddenly and find themselves farther from home than they had ever meant to go; perhaps too far to get back. For Joan suspected that Ellen wasn't a woman who would indulge in illicit amour—at least not for long. She might begin that way; but her delicacy would demand stabilization, regularity—exactly as if it were guile.

And there wasn't a thing his wife could do about it.

There came a day of gusty intermittent rain. Joan stayed at home, wrote dutiful letters to Bob and Marge at their respective camps, played innumerable

games of solitaire, and wondered if her husband would come home to tea. . . . He didn't. He stopped at Ellen's cottage instead, and stood in blank amazement as she met him in the long white gown of the Sargent portrait.

"I've always loved this thing," she explained, flushing prettily. "Sometimes I wear it as a tea gown, when there's no one here to laugh at me. If I'd known you were coming——"

"You knew I couldn't stay away!"

Thereupon he kissed her, for the first time in sixteen years. She yielded for a delirious moment, then put him away, gently reproachful.

"Dear, we mustn't . . . I'll give you tea; then I'll play for you."

Seething with forgotten emotions, he watched her beautiful hands moving about the luster ware; and afterward she played. Debussy, delicate and shadowy, wistful with regret; then a stormy air that took him back to the old days of Heidelberg, when it had been popular—*Amore Proibito*. . . . The music broke off in a crashing discord as he drew her up into his arms. . . . Outside the wind flung gusts of rain against the shingles, the only sound as they clung together. She drew away, shuddering.

"No, no!" she gasped. "I mustn't let you——" She smiled, reproachfully tender. "Charles dear, perhaps we made a dreadful mistake in Heidelberg. But our friendship is so precious. If we let this come in—— What then?"

Charles didn't know what then, and didn't care; he

was staring, fascinated, at the crimson glints of the firelight in her high-piled hair.

"Let it down!" he begged her hoarsely. Her hands rose, then fell.

"I—I'd love to. But you mustn't tempt me——"

Tantalized, avid, he stared into her eyes; they were tender, frightened, expectant. . . . Expectant. . . . A surprising thought occurred to him. If Joan wanted to be tempted she'd say so; if she said "You mustn't" she'd mean "You must *not.*"

Damn! thought Mr. Sturdevant. I must think this over. . . .

"I'd better go," he said, rising abruptly. "But perhaps you'll let me come back to-morrow? Say at four o'clock?"

At dinner he was morose and silent; his wife wondered how much more of this any of them could stand.

V

Charles was still shaving when Joan came down to breakfast and found the mail stacked at her plate. There had never been any reason why she shouldn't distribute the family letters; but this time, as she came to a square blue-gray envelope, she played for a moment with an incredible temptation. It would be so easy to pretend that she hadn't noticed that the address read "Mr." instead of "Mrs."; especially as Ellen hadn't written to him for years. . . . With a

shudder, she dropped the letter at Charles's place. She hadn't come down to that yet.

He turned white when he saw the letter; he tore it open, read it at a glance, and thrust it savagely into the pocket of his dressing-gown. He breakfasted, dressed, and went out without a word. . . . I could kill her, thought Joan, if she's hurt him. Or even if she can.

All morning she was sick; worse than jealousy was this racking uncertainty. . . . They were keeping a single maid in this economical summer; Joan made the beds on the sleeping porch, took care of her dressing-room and Charles's, herself. To-day, as she hung his dressing-gown in the closet, she noticed that letter still protruding from his pocket. He's certainly an amateur at intrigue, she thought drearily, leaving that around. But of course he knows he can trust me. . . .

Another hour of meditation on that white-faced thunderous silence, and her nerves could stand it no longer; she supposed she was a low cowardly sneak, but she had to know what was in that letter. . . . It was brief enough: "Dear, I don't think you'd better come this afternoon; or ever come alone again. Unless——"

Unless! Mrs. Sturdevant sniffed. Damn her, why can't she come out and say it? . . . But she knew what Ellen meant; Charles had known what she meant. And suddenly the tension relaxed; for the first time Mrs. Sturdevant knew where she stood, or didn't

stand. If she knew Charles, his face at breakfast was proof that he was going to Ellen. With compunction, certainly; you'd have to grant that. Still, he was going.

Mrs. Sturdevant lighted a cigarette with steady fingers; and by the time she had smoked it she was resigned—almost reconciled. . . . For he had really belonged to Ellen, always; they were naturally mated, those sentimentalists who lived in a shadowy land of Might-Have-Been and Ought-to-Be; Joan and Brick Hathaway had been only trespassers. The chance of Charles's quarrel with Ellen had flung him in her way, and then desire had upset the balance. . . . Desire that joins together those whom God hath put asunder.

But now desire was on Ellen's side; it was drawing Charles back home. Well——? Mrs. Sturdevant found the solution painfully simple. She'd been spending the income of another woman's property for sixteen years; she couldn't refuse to return the capital. For whatever the theoretical advantages of bigamy, she had learned this summer that it wouldn't work so long as people had feelings. . . . There, now! she thought with something like relief. That's settled. Only I do hope that I'll be able to do this one thing with decency and grace. And in the meantime, I might as well go and play some golf. . . .

She needed all her good resolutions when she found Ellen at the golf club, in the cerise sports frock; when Ellen insisted on their lunching together. Joan was proud of her suavity through that meal; but it was

further strained when Ellen, learning that Joan had come in a taxi (the car was under repair) insisted on taking her home in the speedboat.

"I have some people coming in to tea at four," she apologized, "but I'll have plenty of time to take you home first."

. . . Making sure I won't drop in! thought Joan furiously. And then—— But it isn't guile, really; more like a sort of compunction. I must be fair——

"All right," she assented. "Only I hope you know the channel down the bay; half the buoys broke loose in last night's storm. You wouldn't want to run aground, with guests coming to tea."

"Oh, yes, I know the channel. I'm becoming quite a sportswoman."

Joan doubted it before they had gone a mile, but she was no backseat driver; she ignored Ellen's assurance, and the uneasiness it didn't wholly conceal, content with the rush of wind on her face, the warmth of the sun on her hatless head——

And then, half-way between Ellen's house and Joan's, they ran aground with a crash that flung them both out of their seats.

"Stop that engine!" Joan gasped as they picked themselves up. "This is a rocky ledge; you'll tear the bottom out of her. . . . There! Now reverse and see if you can back off." They couldn't. Ellen was almost tearful, when at last she gave it up. "Huh!" said Mrs. Sturdevant. "Well, the tide's coming in; it will float us off—eventually." (No, that's mean, she told herself as Ellen cast a panicky glance at her

wrist-watch.) "Or haven't you got an oar or a boat-hook to shove with?"

Ellen confessed that she hadn't. . . . She wouldn't have, thought Mrs. Sturdevant. All a fake, this boating craze of hers.

"Then we might as well have a smoke," Joan observed. "It's only a quarter past three. Somebody's bound to come along, sooner or later. If they don't do it sooner we can wave our arms and yell."

They smoked in silence, and nobody came along. Far down the bay they could see the skimming sails of sloops and catboats—beyond signal. The shore was not far away, but here the motor road ran inland, behind low hummocks of sand. . . . Half past three. If it had been my boat, Joan mused, she'd be sure I did it intentionally. Only I wouldn't have done it at all. . . .

Suddenly she drew her feet up out of the water. Some of it had splashed in when they struck, but—— She sounded with her fingers, then straightened up and looked at Ellen.

"There's a rip in her," she announced. "The tide will float us off before long, but I don't believe we can make shore before she fills. And if we've got to swim we might as well get ready now, while we can take our time."

"Swim? Oh, no, Joan! I—I can't swim."

"It isn't more than three hundred yards—and quiet water."

"I can't swim at all," Ellen wailed. "I pretended

I preferred surf because I was ashamed to let you and Charles know I couldn't swim a stroke."

"My God!" said Joan. "But everybody can swim!" . . . Yet Ellen had bought a motor boat because she wanted Charles. For the first time Joan felt a certain respect for Ellen.

"Well, I can't," Ellen insisted. "I was always afraid of the water. . . . We—we'll have to scream."

But the nearest sail was two miles away. . . . Joan laughed, then checked herself. I *must* be decent——

"Look here," she said. "You've got a date at four. If you can't swim, you can at least lie on your back. I'll tow you in."

"I can float," Ellen admitted. "But I'm afraid——"

"Afraid of what? It's easy, so long as you don't get frightened."

"You mean you'd take hold of my hands?" Ellen asked uncertainly.

"You'll need your hands. I'm going to roll up our dresses and shoes, and your hat; and you're going to hold that bundle firmly in both hands, up out of the water. If you let it go, I warn you that I'll let go of you and go after it. We'll be a sad-looking pair when we get ashore; but at least I don't intend to walk home in my underwear."

"But——" Ellen shuddered. "But how will you tow me, then? Not by my feet?"

"By your hair," said Mrs. Sturdevant. "I've always said long hair was only a nuisance, but I see now that it can have its uses. Let it down—and don't forget to save the hairpins."

It wasn't as easy as Joan had expected, and of course Ellen failed to keep the bundle of clothing out of the water. She paid for it; that cerise sports frock had never been made to stand a wetting. They were both sadly bedraggled when they dressed at last between hummocks of sand, but Ellen was undeniably the sadder. Her dress clung in the wrong places, her hair was a dank disheveled tangle; and the hat simply had to be thrown away.

"Never mind," said Joan. "It's only a quarter of four, and you're less than a mile from home. You'll be half dry before you get there, and you'll have time to change your clothes—— Now don't snivel, damn you! What is there to cry about?"

"I'm so ashamed!" Ellen sobbed. "It's so ridiculous! What will Charles think, when he hears I had to be dragged in by the hair?"

"Who the devil's going to tell Charles?"

"You—you mean you wouldn't? . . . Oh, my dear, you're so generous——"

"Do you think I'd spoil what Charles thinks is the world's most beautiful picture? Generous! You make me tired!" Joan controlled herself. "Hurry now, Ellen—go home and dress." And as Ellen hesitated—"Never mind me," said Mrs. Sturdevant. "I'll walk home and dry off."

VI

But she didn't walk home; she walked across the peninsula, to the outer shore where breakers thun-

dered on a long flat beach. By the time she reached it, walking rapidly in the wind, she was dry, warm, bodily comfortable; but bitter at heart. . . . I did manage to be barely decent, she thought, but I just simply can't be gracious. . . . For of course she could have towed Ellen in by the head or shoulders; it had been simply an eruption of human meanness to make her let down her hair. . . .

She stopped, staring. A man was striding toward her, along this lonely beach. Charles, of all people! Walking away from Ellen's house, when he was miles away already—and it was half past four. He hadn't gone to Ellen at all.

Joan's heart was hammering desperately, but she managed to look impassive as he came up.

"Well!" she said. "What are you doing out here?"

"Just walking around," said Charles. "Just walking around. . . . And thinking. Why not?"

"I thought," his wife confessed, "that you were going to tea with Ellen."

He flushed.

"Well, I was. But I changed my mind. . . . I don't like Ellen."

"What?" Joan cried. And then, in an unguarded rush—"Why, I thought you were falling in love with her!"

"I guess I was," Charles conceded. "I've always been sentimental about her. But when I got to thinking it over, I don't like the way her mind works. Tortuous and roundabout."

"Why, Charles! . . . Of course she's a sentimen-

talist; but I thought that was the sort of thing you liked."

"It's the sort of thing I am, but I don't like it —not a bit! . . . Oh, I suppose we'd have got along well enough," Charles sighed, "if we'd married in Heidelberg. Most people's minds worked like that, in those days. But I couldn't stand her—very long—after sixteen years with you."

"With me? Charles, I'm mean and disagreeable; I'm just a hellcat——"

"Sometimes you make me sore as a boil," said Charles frankly. "But you think straight and you know what's happened. Ellen—— Well, she's a lovely woman; but I wouldn't be surprised if she thinks Taft is still president."

"Why, Charles!" was all his wife could say. She could read the quickening admiration in his eyes as she stood outlined against the blue-gray horizon, the wind whipping her short skirt about her knees, her short hair tossed and rumpled about her tanned face. Admiration, and more. . . . Now was her chance to win him back, secure against any further straying—if only she used a little guile.

But guile was something that Mrs. Sturdevant despised.

"Charles, dear!" she said. "I'm glad if you like me. . . . But you want her too; I know it. You need us both. And she's waiting for you. So go ahead and see her. Go ahead and—— Well——"

"You are an astonishing woman," said the man who had lived with her for sixteen years. "Damned if I

can make you out. Do you mean to say that you wouldn't mind it, if I went to Ellen now?"

"I'd hate it," said Joan honestly. "But she's got something for you that I can't give. Go ahead, and come back when you feel like it, and—— Well, I'll try to be as decent about it as I can."

"Unh!" said Charles. "Well, I won't go."

"But Charles, you know you want her——"

"A man can want a lot of women, if he lets himself. . . . I did want her. . . . I suppose it was that hair of hers; I'd never forgotten it. But you carry your stuff inside your head, not on top. . . . I want you too!" he burst out. "And you're the kind of woman a man can want without feeling like a fool——"

"Oh, my dear!" she said. "Oh, my dear!"

. . . But as they walked homeward, her arm linked in his, she told him gravely—

"You know, darling, you must be nice to Ellen. She really is a lovely woman and she can't help being prewar. I do hope you'll go on liking her a little."

For, she reflected, he needs her—a little; he needs us both. And if he keeps on seeing her I won't have to learn tricks like arranging flowers. I'd do that as badly as she runs a speedboat.

COUNT NO MAN HAPPY

YOU might have recognized the house, if you study the pictorial sections of the Sunday papers, or the magazine pages devoted to People in the Public Eye—a big stone house on Prospect Boulevard, the best residence street in Ridgemont. You might have recognized the sunny breakfast room, and you would surely have recognized the man who was just finishing his solitary breakfast—Dr. Victor Compton, whose *Ethics of To-morrow* had been on the bookstore counters for a year and was still selling a thousand copies a day; who was hailed by liberals as the apostle of a new and sane morality, and damned every Sunday from a hundred pulpits as Satan incarnate, the corrupter of modern youth.

He didn't look like Satan; tall and lithe and bronzed, with crisp iron-gray hair and a tolerant twinkle in his gray eyes, he looked like a man of the world, who had yet kept himself unspotted from it—the sort of man to whom you could tell your troubles (as his students at the University of Ridgemont had been doing for twenty years). Also, he looked like what is called a man's man. There were women who wished that he were more of a woman's man, that his vast knowledge of woman in the abstract would translate

itself into some interest in women in the concrete. But everybody knew that he had never been interested in any woman but his wife.

So when he resigned from the university to write his book about the breakdown of the old authoritarian moral code, and the need of a substitute for Christian ethics, people who knew him could not accuse him of trying to find excuses for his own misconduct. The flawless felicity of his home life had enabled the author of *Ethics of To-morrow* to retain his friends and his club memberships, in a city where unorthodoxy was the cardinal sin. The clergy might denounce him as a preacher of promiscuity, but you could hardly take that seriously when you looked at Victor and Adele Compton, for twenty-five years a shining model of monogamous bliss. Nor could you plausibly call him a corrupter of youth if you knew the youth on whom he had had most influence—Alan, his only child, just graduated from the university with brilliant honors; Alan who was good-humored and astute, sane and gay and eager—as good an advertisement as any moral educator could desire.

Alan came into the breakfast room as his father was lighting his pipe. He too was tall and lithe and bronzed, but the twinkle that ordinarily brightened his gray eyes was gone this morning; he nodded to his father and sat down, moody and distrait. Victor Compton was a little worried. . . . But the boy had been out dancing last night; he had heard him come in at dawn. You needed more sleep than that, at twenty-two.

Alan finished his coffee and grapefruit, lighted a cigarette.

"Mother still asleep?" he asked. "She's a sybarite."

"She's a beautiful woman," said her husband proudly, "and sleep is the best of all cosmetics. Besides, she's earned the right to be luxurious; she worked hard enough, all those years we were living on my salary. . . . You might have taken a little more sleep yourself, son. This summer is your vacation; you ought to rest, before you go to Rome." Alan made a vague gesture. "And when you get to Rome," his father advised him, "don't grind too hard. You're a born scholar and Rome's a scholar's paradise; but your health is worth more than all the prizes the American Academy could give you."

"Dad——" Alan dropped his cigarette in his coffee cup and looked out of the window. "I don't want to go to Rome."

"What? . . . Of course," said his father, still incredulous, "you needn't take that scholarship. If you'd rather go to the School of Archæology at Athens, or anywhere else, we've money enough to send you. But I should think——"

"I don't want to go to Europe at all. Mr. Wales has offered me a job with the Valley Trust Company. I want to take it."

His father would have been less dumbfounded if Alan had said he wanted to turn Mohammedan, or enlist in the marines.

"It's your own life," he said last. "Do what you

want, not what I'd have wanted in your place. I don't doubt you could make a banker of yourself, if you tried. But why in the world——? You're a scholar born; it's the work you love, the work you're made for——"

"I'd like to earn a living." Alan's eyes were still aloof.

"We all lived on a professor's salary, till a year ago. And the by-products of scholarship—— Well, I've made half a million dollars out of this book."

"You were lucky." In three words, Alan dismissed the most spectacular literary success of the decade. "I mean you wrote something you believed, and made a lot of money out of it. But nobody ever made half a million dollars out of classical archæology."

"But you don't need to! You don't think your mother and I are going to hold on to every nickel when money rolls in twice as fast as we can spend it? You needn't worry about money; I'll settle a trust fund on you this afternoon—enough to give you an income of ten thousand a year for the rest of your life."

"What?" The boy stared, there were tears in his eyes. "Why, I suppose that would—— Dad, I—I can't thank you——"

"Why should you thank me? It's a pleasure, son. . . . I wanted to be a scholar, too; but I had a wife and baby, I had to keep on teaching. I couldn't take the time for research. I've been a good teacher; I can popularize other men's work—dilute it till the

crowd can swallow it. But that's not the same thing. You'll never need to do that. You can look at something and say, This is mine; I did it myself."

He paused, fussing with his pipe. He could be demonstrative with his wife; but it made him self-conscious to display the emotion he felt about his son.

"Alan, when you were growing up, and I realized that you had a first-rate mind, it used to make me sick to think that all your life you'd be hampered by lack of money. And of all that we've got from this book, the thing I prize most is that it has set you free to do what you want." Alan grinned, almost at his ease again.

"I know you better," he said. "You're not just a —a contributor to other people. What you like most about that book is that it was something you believed, and you made everybody listen to it. . . . But I can't begin to tell you——"

The telephone interrupted him. Compton, still unused to a household with four servants, got up from the table and answered it himself.

"Hello. . . . Why, hello, old man! Great to hear from you! . . . What? Not even staying for lunch? . . . I see. . . . If you're in such a hurry you'd better come to the house, not the office. Adele will want to see you. And Alan—— He was about seven when you saw him last. Wait till you see him now. . . . Yes, come right along."

"Hal Bartlett," he said, turning back from the telephone. "Stopping over for a couple of hours on his way back from Denver to New York. You've heard

of him, of course—half owner of the Wrenn-Bartlett newspaper chain. He was city editor of the *Press* here, years ago, and they discharged him for printing a story some advertiser didn't like. So he went to New York, and got in with old J. C. Wrenn, and eventually bought the paper that fired him. But this is the first time he's been in Ridgemont since he was thrown out; he seemed to hold a grudge against the town. . . . He and his wife were great friends of ours, when he lived here. That was his first wife; I believe he's had two or three more, since." Alan was moving toward the door. "Aren't you going to wait and see him?" his father asked.

"I can't, dad. I—I told a man I'd see him downtown at half past ten."

"Not Wales of the Valley Trust?"

"No. . . . I guess that was a crazy idea, dad. Don't worry about it. . . . I'll be out for lunch. Tell mother, if you're going up to wake her."

II

Compton's concern was gone as he ran lightly up-stairs. Boys just out of college had these wild notions; he remembered that he had almost joined a classmate who was going to grow cantaloupes in the Imperial Valley. Only Adele's unwillingness to leave Ridgemont had kept him here, doing the work he was meant for, work crowned at last by this triumph that was still incredible. He owed everything to Adele.

Her bedroom door was ajar; from the threshold he regarded her relaxed grace as she lay sleeping—still creamy-skinned, still slender, at forty-four. A bare arm curled about her head; her shingled hair was soft and wavy, and pure white. An illness had whitened it when she was thirty, and what they had taken for calamity had proved a blessing; people had thought of her as a white-haired young woman for so long that they would go on thinking of her as a white-haired young woman till she was sixty. Her unlined face looked as if she had never had a worry. She had had plenty, but she hid them behind that unruffled mask and hid other things, too. People who met her for the first time were apt to think her impassive; but if you knew her——!

Her eyes opened; she stifled a yawn, and smiled at him.

"Hello! . . . Is it terribly late?"

"Not very, but Hal Bartlett's coming up from downtown. He's only here for an hour or so, and he wants to see us." She sprang out of bed and kissed him lightly.

"Then run away!" she commanded. "I'll have to hurry if I'm to receive him at the breakfast table, even in negligée."

Rapid bathing and dressing was an art she had learned when her husband taught an eight o'clock class at the university. Bartlett had not yet appeared when she came down, in pajamas of black chiffon velvet. She poured her coffee, lighted a cigarette.

"Where's Alan?" she asked. "Gone out already?"

"He had some engagement downtown. . . . He had a wild idea that he ought to start making money, right away. He wanted to take a job at the Valley Trust——"

"Good heavens!" said his mother. "That means a girl."

"What?" Compton broke into relieved laughter. "Why, of course! Queer that I never thought of it. . . . Well, I told him we'd endow him, with ten thousand a year. He can marry her this summer and take her to Rome with him." But his wife was frowning.

"I wonder who——?" she muttered. "I can't think of any one he's been going with, particularly. . . . Except Brenda Vincent, of course."

"Brenda? But he's only been going with her because her husband asked him to see that she wasn't left out of everything while he was in China. . . . I mean——" said Compton. "You don't imagine there's anything——"

"Your horror," she said, "would astonish the critics of your book. And pain some of its admirers, I'm afraid. You've argued that a childless marriage ought to be dissolved at the wish of either partner—even that there's no need of a marriage ceremony at all, until a child has been conceived."

"That's only theory, at present. Most people still get married; and I've always argued that when a man and a woman have promised to stick together, the burden of proof is on the one who wants to break it up. . . . Besides, when a man goes away for six

months on business, and asks a friend to be attentive to his wife, he puts faith in his friend's honor. To betray it—— Well, it isn't done. Alan wouldn't do it."

"I don't think there's any danger," his wife reassured him. "He's twenty-two and Brenda's twenty-seven—a big difference, at their age. Besides, he's seen very little of her lately; which suggests that he's been seeing somebody else. I suppose he'll tell us who it is after he's given her the glad news."

"Yes. Of course." Compton's hands shook a little as he refilled his pipe—and the door-bell announced the arrival of Hal Bartlett.

III

He swept in like a breeze, shook hands with Victor, turned to Adele and kissed her heartily. Her husband blinked; even in these casual days she wasn't given to kissing other men. But few women refused to kiss Hal Bartlett. . . . Absurd to be so touchy. . . . Bartlett sat down, looked about him, and grinned.

"This place used to belong to old Harrington of the First National, didn't it? How does it feel, Vic, to live on Millionaires' Row, and be a world-famous celebrity? Not to speak of the blessings you've always had—a brilliant son, and the most beautiful wife in Ridgemont."

"How does it feel? . . . Hal, sometimes it almost frightens me. The Greeks used to think that the gods were jealous of a man who had too much good for-

tune; they pulled him down. Solon told Crœsus to count no man happy till he was dead; you never could tell what might happen to him." He grinned. "I thought things would happen to me, when this book came out. I'd quit the university already, but I thought I'd have to resign from my clubs, perhaps even leave town. But nothing much happened; even the preachers who denounce me from the pulpit still play golf with me. Ridgemont has been very tolerant."

"So I've heard," said Bartlett. "As you probably know, a lot of people would still like to get you, but there's nothing they can take hold of. And why do you suppose Ridgemont is tolerant, for the first time in its history?"

"Well, I'm vain enough to think it's because they know us. Adele and I—our friends can't quite believe we're moral anarchists. . . . Why, even the Bishop—— He shakes his head, of course, when he meets me at the club; but he's been quite decent about it all."

"The Bishop," said Bartlett, "is honorary president of the Chamber of Commerce. . . . Don't you see it, Vic? You're the best press agent this town ever had —the only resident of Ridgemont who's made the front page of the New York papers since old Senator Peltz died. They might as well default on a city bond issue as run you out of town."

"Oh, I can't quite believe that, Hal. Of course," said Compton, "all this publicity was a tremendous surprise to me. I went at this——" He smiled at his

wife. "We both went at it in a mood of self-sacrifice. It meant giving up the job we'd always lived on; and we thought the book would sell two or three thousand copies, and perhaps cause some thinking among intellectuals that might lead to something twenty years from now."

"You forget," said Bartlett, "that everybody's an intellectual now. Or at least thinks he is. And almost everybody's promiscuous. But some people are still so old-fashioned that they want an excuse for it."

"But damn it, man, I don't encourage promiscuity! I merely recognize that it's here. People no longer let the old rules hold them back; we know that, and I don't like it. I've tried to sketch a new morality—rational and workable standards that will reduce promiscuity to a minimum. . . . Did you read that book, Hal?"

"Certainly I read it. As I understand it, you think that if men and women are allowed to do whatever they want, they'll all want to get married and live faithfully ever after."

"Not all—but most of them. Monogamy is the normal relation, Hal—the deepest satisfaction, for most people. I hope we can get rid of promiscuity; but if we must have it, we'd better have it before marriage than after. It makes me sick, Hal, to see idealistic young people keeping themselves continent—yes, they still do it, some of them; the boys even more than the girls—and going into marriage all steamed up with high emotion—and then, at forty, losing their faith, losing their balance, making dreadful asses of them-

selves. If they've got to shop around they'd better do it before than after. They'll upset fewer apple carts, and they'll have a better chance of finding somebody they can stick to."

"I believe," Bartlett began, "it's your doctrine that the children come first——"

"Absolutely! What a man and woman unattached may do is no concern of society. But the moment a child is born, or even conceived, they ought to consider that child's interest before their own. I don't say that a marriage with children should never be dissolved; but you've got to be sure that divorce would be best for the children. Let childless couples do as they please; but a child makes a marriage."

"Well, it's an interesting theory," Bartlett observed. "What do you think of it, Adele?" Her face was a smiling mask.

"I suppose it would be better than the way things are now. . . . But I don't know; I'm not an intellectual. What do you think of it?"

"I've been too busy practising marriage to go very deep into the theory. When you're paying alimony to three women your judgment is a bit clouded. But I know this much about Vic's ideas—they're still news. That's why I'm here. Vic, how about writing a weekly syndicate feature for the Wrenn-Bartlett newspapers, to run a year? Fifty-two articles, a thousand words apiece, a dollar and a half a word. Even with all your bloated profits, I suppose you could use another seventy-eight thousand."

The Comptons stared at each other; the big money

was still so new that mention of such figures amazed them.

"Why, I don't know, Hal," said Compton slowly. "I've said about all I had to say. It wouldn't be fair to rehash the old stuff."

"You could say it to a new audience—reach millions of people who don't buy books. Spread your message."

"If you put it that way——" Compton began, then broke off with a grimace. "I was about to fool myself," he said. "It's hard not to fool yourself, when the money begins to come in. . . . No, Hal, I won't do it. I won't say anything more till I've got something new to say. . . . And do you know why I won't do it?" he demanded fierily. "As a sort of—well, call it a thank offering. To—to Fortune."

He began to stride up and down, puffing at his pipe.

"Hal, I had a piece of great and undeserved good luck. I wrote this book because I believed it and thought people needed it. I've seen so many people, young and middle-aged, make messes of their lives because they've thrown away the old rule book, and are trying to do without any rule book at all. That won't work. I thought I could suggest some rules that might work better. So I gave up my professorship and threw away all hope of another, spent every cent I'd saved, exposed Adele to the risk of poverty—real poverty—at forty-four—all because I believed that this was true and ought to be said. Hal, if they'd told me I'd be burned at the stake for writing that book, I believe I

could have got up the nerve to go through with it." He halted, smiling.

"And then," he said, "it made my fortune. Maybe it's superstitious, but I feel that I owe somebody something for that. I won't write any more till I find something else that I think is true, and needs saying. Don't you know I'm right, Hal?"

"Oh, I'm a newspaperman. I'm not sure I know anything except that a good comic strip is more precious than rubies; and that the next best thing, right now, would be a syndicate feature by the author of *Ethics of To-morrow.* Vic, if you ever do decide to write for the papers, will you give me first call?"

"Of course. I owe you that for the splendid way the *Press* has stood by me in Ridgemont, even when the other papers were against me."

"You don't owe me anything for that. The *Press* is always glad to annoy the vested respectabilities of this town. I haven't forgotten how they threw me out."

"I didn't mean editorial support so much as publicity in the news columns. When the book came out the *Press* quoted it by the page, interviewed me, stirred up people to reply to me, day after day—and all of that was telegraphed all over the country by the press associations. That's what really gave me my start."

"But you still don't owe me or my papers any thanks," said Bartlett. "A good newspaper is as impersonal, in its news columns, as the law of gravitation. Step out of that window and you'll fall to the ground. The law of gravitation doesn't care whether you're

going to fall two feet or two hundred. So with an honest paper—if you do something that's news the paper is going to feature it, whether it damns you forever or makes your fortune. It was your luck that when you broke into the news it made you. But you were always a lucky devil, Vic." Bartlett rose. "I've got to hustle for my train," he said. "I hope you people are coming to New York, some of these days."

"Next month—when Alan sails for Europe."

"Then stay a couple of weeks after he's gone. The papers will give you about a hundred thousand dollars' worth of free publicity, if your publishers know how to handle you. And the current Mrs. Bartlett is always glad to see my old friends from back home."

"You'll excuse my not going out with you?" said Adele, rising. "Ridgemont progresses; we receive in our pajamas, but we haven't got around to wearing them on the front porch."

She gave him her hands; this time she kissed him spontaneously. But Victor Compton was beyond absurd jealousies, now.

"Yes," he said as he walked out with Bartlett, "I've always been lucky. Monogamy would seem the normal state to any man who lived with Adele. And Alan—— I wish you'd seen him, Hal; he's going to be a better man than I ever dreamed of being. The best thing I've ever done in my life was to give him his start. . . . Good-by, old man."

Bartlett's car drove away; and Victor Compton lingered on the porch, in the mansion that had once be-

longed to old Harrington of the First National Bank, wondering with a rather humble gratitude at the transformation that had enabled him to refuse seventy-eight thousand dollars for a rather fine point of conscience. Yes, he'd always been lucky. . . .

He heard the telephone ringing, heard his wife answering it.

"Hello. . . . Yes, this is Doctor Compton's residence. Mrs. Compton speaking. Who is this? . . . Who? . . . The police station——?"

IV

Alan had rung a door-bell on the twelfth floor of Ridgemont's newest apartment house, much favored by childless couples of the younger married set. A girl in a rose negligée let him in. She was slim and young, but her eyes were haggard; the rouge made patches on her pallid cheeks. He caught her up eagerly.

"Brenda! Darling!"

She was limp in his arms; when he kissed her she turned her lips away. He let her go; she walked to the window, stood staring out.

"Well——" She turned and faced him. "I guess there's no doubt about it. Got any bright ideas about what we're going to do?"

"Yes, it's all right! I was ready to take a job downtown—but I won't have to. Dad told me this morning that he'd endow me, with ten thousand a year. So I can take you to Rome with me——" She

shrugged irritably. "I suppose we couldn't leave Ridgemont together," he said. "But people are going to have to know before long. You could slip away and join me over there. Then, when John's got his divorce, we can be married——"

"Is that all you can think about? I don't want to marry you."

He felt an inner simmering—countless tiny tingling explosions.

"You've said you loved me," he told her. "Again and again."

"I might have said anything, then. . . . I thought I did," she conceded. "For a while. This is as much my fault as yours, Alan. John's fault most of all; he ought to have known better than to go away and leave me. But he did go away; and in three weeks he's coming back. And all you can think of is that I ought to get myself divorced so I can marry you."

"You know I'm crazy about you," he told her unsteadily. "I am still—more than ever. When you wouldn't let me see you for weeks, till last night—— It was horrible! . . . This—— Well—— No wonder it upsets you. But I could make you happy——"

"Oh, I'm sick of the sight of you!" she screamed. She was standing by the open window, careless of the neighbors' ears. "You got me into this," she said, "and you've got to get me out. I could find out where to go; Edna Ferrell across the court there would tell me. And then she'd have something on me all the rest of my life. I don't dare. . . . But you could find somebody——"

"Not that, Brenda! We haven't any right."

"Any right! You've been reading that crazy book of your father's! He thinks grown-up people haven't any rights; that they ought to pay all their lives for a little carelessness. Well, I'm not going to! I'm crazy about my husband! I want him! Do you think I'm going to give him up just because you and I lost our heads after he'd left me alone for months?"

"Not so loud! Everybody will hear you!" He strode forward, seized her. She writhed in his grasp, her clenched fists beat helplessly on his chest. "About John——" he said. "I'm ashamed. It was rotten of us to cheat him; but I loved you—and you loved me, then. You know it. I can't be sorry. But if we did a thing like this——"

He broke off; through the open window he had seen a woman at a window across the court, watching them with gleeful interest. Edna Ferrell. . . . His arms relaxed just as Brenda, still struggling, gave him a furious shove. The impact sent them staggering apart; the hollows of her knees struck the low window sill——

He saw two outflung arms clutching wildly at nothing, then two slim legs sticking straight up in the air. He plunged forward, looked over the window sill. Into the well of the court, a hundred feet deep, a bundle of fluttering rose was falling, turning over and over. It struck. An instant of dead silence, then a dull thwack floated up. . . .

He felt his feet stamping the floor as he ran out, felt his fingers pushing the elevator bell. No answer;

he could picture elevator boys and hall boys gathering something in the paved court. He didn't want to see It, but he was drawn irresistibly. . . . There was a fire stair beside the elevator; he ran down the steps, flight after flight. The bottom at last. He stumbled out of the stairway door at the rear of the lobby, white, shuddering—the very picture of guilt, conscious and fleeing guilt, to the arriving policeman who intercepted him.

V

Victor Compton sneaked home in the dark, and was grateful for it. So much of these last thirty-six hours had been bright daylight; a man couldn't hide from it, even in a lawyer's office; not even in that cold gray building where he had seen Alan, with iron bars between them. . . . Alan who was held on the charge of murder; Alan who would hardly say a word, even to his father and mother, who talked thickly, incoherently, when he spoke at all. Alan, who was always staring fixedly at something he saw every moment, in daylight or dark—two slim silken legs sticking straight up in the air.

Compton drew the shades on the living-room windows clear down to the sill before he turned on the light. He supposed Adele was somewhere about, but he could do nothing for her; for thirty-six hours she had been a dead white mask; she hadn't said five words to him, or to any one but Alan; she didn't seem to know whether he was there or not. It might have

helped a little if he could have done something for Adele. . . .

He dropped into a chair, touched a lighted match to a pipe he had forgotten to fill. Not much use shutting himself in; even alone, even in the dark, the mad phantasmagoria of these last two days still assailed his eyes and ears. Policemen, lawyers, and always reporters; reporters everywhere. He could shake them off; but he couldn't escape seeing the papers. The papers that had made him.

They were howling at him, howling at Alan, like wolves on the trail. Even the *Press,* usually so eager to annoy the vested respectabilities, was running with the pack this time—leading the pack. The whole story, as Ridgemont saw it, had been summed up in that first headline in the *Press*:

SEX AUTHOR'S SON SLAYS LOVE MATE

Sex author's son. . . . Every paper in Ridgemont, perhaps every paper in the country, was reprinting long passages from *Ethics of To-morrow.* Selected passages. . . . Impersonal as the law of gravitation; this was news, whether it damned a man or made his fortune. Beyond question Victor Compton was damned, but that didn't matter now. What mattered was that Victor Compton's book seemed likely to damn his son.

At first Compton had simply been appalled by a horrible accident; he had never doubted that Alan's innocence would be obvious. Why, the whole town

knew Alan! But then had come this Ferrell woman with her incredible story; she had heard Brenda tell Alan that she was sick of the sight of him, that she loved her husband; and then, said the Ferrell woman, he had pushed her out of the window. . . . Hysterical, of course; but her testimony went into the record. Still, even when Alan had been locked up by order of a magistrate, his father had never doubted that they could get him off.

He had gone to his own lawyer—Lucius Leigh, his lifelong friend, the best and most respected lawyer in Ridgemont. . . . "Compton, I'm terribly sorry, but I'm engaged on another case that takes all of my time. Can't betray the interests of my client, you know, even to oblige an old friend." . . . Then to Marlowe the second-best lawyer. Marlowe had at least been frank. "Compton, I don't dare. If I happened to get an acquittal I'd have to resign from my clubs. You don't realize how much feeling that book of yours stirred up. It was driven underground for a while; but now that we all see exactly where that sort of doctrine leads——"

Marlowe had been keeping a woman in the South End for years; the whole town knew it; his wife knew it. But that was beside the point.

So at last Victor Compton had gone to Brady. To go to Brady was a confession of guilt; but he belonged to no clubs, he had no reputation, except for getting the guilty acquitted. Brady had taken his check for ten thousand dollars, and then shrugged.

"Ordinarily," he said, "I'd get a change of venue. But there's no use doing that; your book's known everywhere. Ordinarily, too, we might get the District Attorney to accept a plea of guilty in the second degree. That means twenty years to life; but you get out in twelve years if you behave yourself." (Twelve years!) "But no chance of that this time," said Brady regretfully. "The District Attorney's going to run for Governor next year, and he needs a hanging in this case to be sure of the church vote. . . . No, I'm afraid we'll have to fall back on insanity."

"Insanity? But that would be admitting that he killed her! And he didn't! He couldn't! It's unthinkable!"

"Of course," said Brady soothingly. "But there's that Ferrell woman—a friend of both of them, and a millionaire's daughter. And of course Mrs. Vincent's condition supplies a motive. You and I might not consider it a motive, but the average juryman——"

"But if they've read my book, they'd know——"

"Hell, you don't suppose jurymen read, do you? They haven't read your book; they've heard about it. They'll hear bits of it read in court, by the District Attorney. I'll object, of course, but the Judge will overrule me. Not the whole book; just choice bits. . . . No, if we can get some experts to swear he's insane, and even one or two jurors to believe them, we'll be damn lucky. I think we might get him out of the asylum in two or three years, when this has blown over."

"Brady, the boy was in love with her. He's almost crazy now. Two years in an asylum, and he'd really go insane!"

Brady shrugged again.

"It's the best chance. In fact the only chance."

. . . So Victor Compton sat in his living-room behind drawn blinds, absently lighting one match after another and touching them to an empty pipe. . . . A ring at the door; voices in the hall. The maid on the threshold——

"The Bishop is calling."

VI

The Bishop of Ridgemont was a man of the world —so much a man of the world that his friends were apt to forget that his professional concerns were otherworldly. For twenty years Victor Compton had known him, as an excellent golfer, a brilliant bridge player, a polished orator at Chamber of Commerce luncheons; as a connoisseur of Burgundy and Madeira in the old days (though his present abstinence was well known). But there was one character in which Compton had never seen him till to-night—the right reverend father in God.

He came forward now, episcopal sternness overlaid by pastoral charity.

"Compton, my friend——" He paused, smiling. "I suppose you won't let me call you my son; you have long been estranged from the Church. But I venture to come in the name of the Church—yes, and of

your old friends—in the hope that I may offer you some consolation."

"He didn't do it!" Compton cried. "You know he didn't do it!"

"I should gladly believe he did not. He was a splendid boy."

"Was?" his father shrieked. "He is! We're going to get him acquitted! Don't talk as if—as if he were gone already."

"I sincerely hope you may prove that there has been some mistake. And I would not add to your burden by pointing out the obvious——"

"That my book's a millstone around his neck? . . . Yes," said Compton. "I know that well enough."

"If you know that," said the Bishop, "some good may yet come of this terrible tragedy. We have had an object lesson that for all our modernism, the wages of sin is still——" Suavely, he suppressed the word. "It's a pity," he said. "These young people, I suppose, were drawn to each other by a feeling that had its deceptive show of beauty. If they had not been ill-advised, Compton——" His voice was resonant in the silent house. "If they and millions like them had not been taught that they could safely discard revealed truth, warnings from on high reinforced by two thousand years of human experience——"

Instinctively Victor Compton struck out in self-defense.

"People were discarding the old code before I ever wrote. I only recognized that, and tried to give them something in its place."

"I have never doubted your good intention," the Bishop conceded. "But when you see to what your teaching leads—— Granted that this was an accident, Compton. None the less, the young people had sinned. A sin that you had taught them was no sin at all."

"That's not fair! I hold that a woman should be faithful to one man, and a man to one woman, at a time; that a childless wife who falls in love with another man should leave the husband and marry the other. Which is what Alan wanted her to do. . . . As for her being his friend's wife, in his friend's absence—— That's a special case; I hadn't foreseen it."

"Every case is a special case, Compton. The Church learned that, long ago."

"Well, as to this special case——" said Compton desperately. "They should have waited till they could tell her husband, frankly——"

"They should have waited? But they were human. And there is the fatal flaw in your theories. You're a good man, in intention; a learned man, in abstractions. But you don't know human nature as the Church has learned to know it. You think that if men and women are permitted to choose their own way they will choose the right. The Church knows better."

Compton stared into the cold fireplace. There were gaps—he was sure of it—in the Bishop's reasoning; questions begged, conclusions assumed as premises. But he was too weary, too distraught, to search them out.

"What does it matter?" he said wearily. "I don't think you're right. But even if you were, what could I do about it now?"

"Recant!" the Bishop thundered. "Abjure your errors! Make public confession—to the newspapers —that you see where your abominable doctrine leads! That would undo some of the harm you have wrought; it might save other men's sons from the disaster that threatens yours. . . . And perhaps, Compton, it might save your son, too."

"Save Alan? How?"

"Compton, all your old friends pity you. And they pity that poor boy whom we all love, and who weakly yielded to an impulse he had been taught to gratify, not to repress. If there is a guilty man it is you, Victor Compton, not the boy whose character you formed! As for Alan—— Nothing the law might do to him could bring back that unhappy girl. The most we can hope for from this deplorable affair is a lesson—a lesson that may save other men's sons and daughters. If you recant, that lesson is made clear. . . . I do not ask you to go all the way, to return to the Church. I would not have any man do what his conscience forbids. But you have been a stumbling-block to the weak and ignorant. Remove that stumbling-block from their path! That is more important than any infliction of the penalties of the law."

"You mean that Alan——"

"Personally," said the Bishop, "I am convinced that the death was accidental. We have no evidence to the

contrary but the words of a frightened, hysterical woman, who can no longer remember just what she did see and hear in that horrible moment."

"Mrs. Ferrell can't remember?" Compton gasped. "Why, then——"

"Mrs. Ferrell," said the Bishop, "belongs to one of our best families, of the old stock. A little worldly, perhaps, a little lax; but still a girl of our own sort. Some of your friends have talked to her father, and he has talked to her. She says she has no idea of what she may have told the police, in that moment of shock. She might have said anything. . . . She might still say anything, Compton."

"But the police took notes of her testimony. They've been printed."

"The notes may be lost before the trial; and newspaper stories are not evidence. The District Attorney is prepared not to question Mrs. Ferrell too closely. If your son says it was an accident, if she says —as she may—that her memory is a blank, the jury will realize that there is no proof of a crime at all. It is not too much to say that men will be chosen as jurors who will be sure to realize it. . . . Indeed there may never be a trial. If Mrs. Ferrell repudiates her first wild words the District Attorney might drop the whole case. . . . So you see, Compton, your old friends haven't left you in the lurch. I can give you my personal assurance that your boy will be released——"

"If I recant. . . . And if I don't——?"

The Bishop leaned back in his easy chair, finger-tips gently touching.

"I'm afraid, Compton, it is the general feeling that the lesson of this tragedy must be unmistakably taught. If not in one way, then in another."

"I see. . . . I recant, or my son is hanged." Compton tried to fill his pipe, gave it up after he had covered his lap with spilled tobacco. "You're surprised," he said, "that I hesitate for an instant. So am I. But what I put in that book is what I believe—the truth, as I see it. I believe it's true, I believe it's useful; I believe that if those ideas prevail, people will live better and happier lives. I suppose that faith is—well, my substitute for God."

"Always substitutes!" the Bishop sighed.

"Well—would you recant your faith, for any reason?"

"I cannot admit that the cases are parallel. . . . Consider it in this light, my friend. You have faith in what you regard as truth. So did Galileo. He recanted—yet the earth still goes round the sun. If your truth is truth, and not error, it will still be true even though Victor Compton denies it."

"Yes, but if I deny my truth—— I've heard you preach about Abraham. His God demanded that he sacrifice his son. Abraham was ready to do it, and you said his faith and submission were splendid. . . . But you have no son. I know how Abraham felt."

"Passing over your blasphemy, which I am sure was inadvertent, may I point out a difference between the two cases? Abraham's son was spared, at the last moment; a ram was provided instead. In the present instance there will be no ram."

"And this," said Compton, "is the favor my friends have done me."

"Yes. Your friends, who have watched your progress with pain; your friends, most of whom believe your son is a murderer; your friends, whose sons and daughters you have led astray. I must say, Compton, I think your friends have gone pretty far to help you."

"And you want an answer now—yes or no?"

"Think it over, if you like—till to-morrow. We can't let it go too long; who knows what Mrs. Ferrell might remember, if she were not well advised? Let me know to-morrow, before noon. I shall busy myself in the meantime with writing out a statement, which perhaps you will be good enough to sign and give to the evening papers. I can perhaps suggest a more felicitous phraseology than would occur to you; but it would make a better impression if the statement appeared to be spontaneous."

"It undoubtedly would. . . . Well," said Compton, "I'll let you know in the morning."

He walked with the Bishop to the door; and when he came back he found his wife in the living-room. Her white mask had cracked at last; she was glaring at him, with horror and with hate.

VII

"You let him go?" she gasped. "Run after him, and call him back! . . . Yes, I heard you. I'd fallen asleep in the next room. I woke up just now—but

I couldn't believe what I heard. I thought I was dreaming, till I heard the slam of the door. . . . And you let him go!"

He dropped into a chair, his head and arms hanging limp.

"I suppose I'll give in," he said at last. "Deny what I believe, swear to a lie, give up trying to help people out of their troubles——"

"Help people out of their troubles? Aren't you going to help Alan out of his trouble? You? . . . You've always said that the children come first. Men and women mustn't consider themselves, they must think of their children. And you hesitate to save your own son!"

"It's not for myself, Adele. It's what I've contributed to a better morality——"

"Morality! What do you know about morality? You've never needed any; you're a one-woman man. You don't know how it feels to be pulled between two attractions, two loyalties. I don't profess to know anything about morality either, but I know there's a way to save Alan. . . . Victor," she said, "have I made you happy? Have you liked living with me—not just at first, but always? Right up till now?"

"Always, my dear. You know that."

"Well—you owe it to Alan. If I hadn't had a little boy who needed his father and his mother both, I'd have gone to New York with Hal Bartlett fifteen years ago. I think I could have held Hal; and I know he'd never have left a son of his in the lurch."

"Good God, Adele! I never dreamed——"

"I know you didn't. I'd never have told you, if it hadn't been for this. I've been glad I didn't go with Hal; I was over that brainstorm in six months. I've been happy with you—happy enough, anyway. . . . But if you let them hang Alan, I'll never speak to you or look at you again."

"I couldn't blame you," he said brokenly. "For of course what I feel—it's personal——"

"It's your pride. . . . If you think more of your pride than your own son——"

"Not my pride," he said. "That's gone; my usefulness too, I'm afraid. Victor Compton and his ideas are pretty thoroughly damned, in the mind of the public, no matter how this comes out. I'd ruin any cause I supported, now. . . . But I still believe I was right; there may be a few other people who agree with me—people my ideas might help. If I deny them, now—— Don't you see, Adele? It's not Alan or me; it's Alan or—well, call it truth."

"Truth?" she said bitterly. "What is truth?"

And, of course, he did not know. He had only faith. . . .

"Well?" she demanded after a protracted silence.

"I don't know," he said. "I'm still thinking."

COLD SUNLIGHT

CRESSIDA PARR drifted down the sunny side of Broadway, leaning back against the insistent push of the north wind. Her worn brown coat was clutched tight about her slim body, the shabby fur collar was turned up till it brushed the brown turban that confined her golden brown hair; but even under the coat she was cold, and her slim beige legs were chilled from the instep to the knee. The noonday sun shone bright —such January sunshine as couldn't always be counted on in the rainy Gulf Coast town from which she had come; but when the sun shone back home there was warmth in it.

Cressida shivered, but she was glad to be out of Mrs. Eier's stuffy apartment. Not that she had anything against Mrs. Eier, or the part-time job with Mrs. Eier that paid her room rent and bought her meals, except when she was dining with Ted. But Mrs. Eier and her apartment were so hopelessly Upper West Side. Cressida hadn't come all the way from Mississippi to be Upper West Side. She was Broadway; and people who read theater programs knew it if they ever glanced at the line that read: "A Maid— Cressida Parr."

She knew this part of Broadway by heart, after five years; but despite the chill insistence of the wind she drifted slowly, staring into the windows. A cigar

store on the corner, then a lingerie shop—black lace stepins, $2.98. Her glance passed them indifferently to linger on pink quilted dressing gowns at $5.65. One of those would be comfortable in her chilly furnished room, but she couldn't spare $5.65. . . . A lunch counter next, a ticket agency, a movie palace with people drifting in out of the cold; then the showcase of a theatrical photographer.

Cressida paused; behind the glass her own face looked at her, but nobody would have known it. Her hair had been clipped close above her ears, when that picture was taken; the violet eyes whose shadowy wistfulness was her best asset stared wildly from the print. That was another woman, a cheaper woman. Really, she needed new photographs. . . . She needed a chinchilla coat, too, and a Rolls Royce. She drifted on.

A men's furnishing shop, the doorway of a padlocked night club; then Mme. Yolanda, gowns—regular $14.75 value reduced to $9.95. Cressida peered at the signed photographs in the showcase. . . . "To Mme. Yolanda, in appreciation. Cressida Parr. *Golden Ankles.*" . . . It had been the road company of *Golden Ankles,* and the appreciation had been evoked by Mme. Yolanda's willingness to accept the photograph in lieu of cash on the bill; still, Cressida considered, it was always a good thing to get one's face before the public. . . . She let the wind blow her past Mme. Yolanda's door, and brought up breathless at the goal of her driftings—a stairway with a brass sign overhead: "Louis Wallfish Productions."

II

"A Louis Wallfish production is always interesting," the dramatic critics usually began their reviews; and then they had a way of adding, "but——" In ten years Wallfish had produced nine plays. Two of them had won Pulitzer prizes; one of them had run a year on Broadway and was running yet, in stock and the talkies; he had lived on it ever since. Five of the others had closed within three weeks. Hence his office consisted of two rooms and his staff of one office boy, who was usually out to lunch. And he never risked his own money any more, having discovered that other people would risk theirs for the glory of association with a Louis Wallfish production.

So when Cressida drifted past the office boy's empty chair into the inner office, she found two men there. Wallfish faced her blandly across his desk—thick iron-gray hair brushed back from a plump face, fatherly brown eyes behind shell-rimmed glasses. But the man who lounged in the low chair beside him was different —tall and thin, with a smartness that was Racquet Club, not Lambs. His black eyes glittered in a thin face; his mustache was a thin black line like a woman's eyebrows. Cressida wondered if she hadn't met him somewhere, hoped she had, and gave him a nod and a smile on suspicion.

"Not a thing just now, Miss Parr," said Wallfish. "I don't know yet what I'm going to do this spring." (Meaning, Cressida supposed, that he didn't know

whether the black-mustached man would put up the money.)

"You asked me to drop in this week," she reminded him. "You said you might produce that new play of Carter's." He shrugged.

"I wanted Elise Lamont for the lead. Brady has got her tied up."

"I was her understudy last year," said Cressida. "I almost got to play her part one night. So if you can't get her——"

Sheer amazement at her own effrontery stopped her. Besides, Wallfish was wriggling and shrugging, and smiling with the kindly patience of a father explaining to baby that he can't get the moon for her.

"I couldn't do it, without Lamont. No, I'm afraid there's nothing just now." Cressida rose, clutching her worn coat about her slim body; the violet eyes were shadowed. "But come around next week," Wallfish added. "I might have something."

"You've got my telephone number?" she asked. "Circle 11291—that's where I live. But of mornings you can reach me at Schuyler 14285, with Mrs. Eier. Mrs. Gifford Eier, you know. The peace advocate."

"Oh," said Wallfish. "You're working for her?"

"I'm associated with her," said Cressida with dignity.

Violet eyes and slim beige legs drifted out. To Joe Sirrine, in the low chair beside Wallfish, it was is if a cloud had shadowed the sun.

"Who was that, Louis? She knew me, and I've seen her somewhere."

"In a cap and apron. She plays a maid when she has a part at all."

"Where would you use her, then, in Carter's piece?"

"Nowhere," said Wallfish. "She is no good, this Cressida Parr. She never had more than six lines in her life. Usually only one—'Yes, madame.'"

"But if she was Lamont's understudy——"

"Understudy! What does that mean? I heard about it, that time she almost played Lamont's part. Lamont had a sore throat, but when she realized this girl must take her place, she got out of bed and walked through it, so hoarse they couldn't hear her three rows back."

"But if this girl had a chance, she might——"

"Listen, Joe—could I play Lindbergh? Well, I can play Lindbergh as well as she can play anything but herself. I tell you I've seen her!"

"Lucy Pell jumped from Junior League to the top, playing herself."

"Lucy Pell had something; including friends who would write plays exactly fitted to her personality."

"This girl has something, too," Sirrine insisted.

"Violet eyes," said Wallfish. "Sex appeal combined with a peach-blossom innocence. She could sell that, in the chorus; but she would as soon sell it on the street. Back home in Sunday school, they taught her that chorus girls are bad. She came to New York to be an actress—that or nothing. And she can't act."

"Then why did you tell her to come back, if you won't give her anything? Why not tell her she's hopeless, and put her out of her misery?"

Wallfish looked out of the window, too much interested in the question to wonder why Sirrine asked it. Disinterested sympathy with the poor and struggling was not among Sirrine's virtues; but interested sympathy for poor and struggling girls who were good to look at——

"You would not understand this, Joe," said Louis Wallfish. "You were born on Murray Hill and you always had money. But I came to town from Sedalia, Missouri; and even on my first job, working for twelve dollars a week, I was happy, for I was in the show business on Broadway. That sunlight out there is cold, but it is bright; and that is what counts for people who have got this disease. Girls like this one who ought to be selling hats or taking dictation—so long as they get bits now and then they are happy; for this is their career, they are actresses on Broadway. God knows how they live——"

"You know how they live," Sirrine interrupted.

"Not all of them. Not this one—you can tell that from her clothes; and she wouldn't be advocating peace for the Eier woman if somebody was keeping her. No, she probably lives in a hall bedroom; she eats at the automat; but she is an actress on Broadway, and tomorrow she may get the part that will put her over. But if I tell her that she is hopeless, that she had better go back home and marry her old sweetheart who maybe has got a good business by now, does she do it? No, she thinks I am crazy. And if she didn't think I was crazy she would turn on the gas. I can't do that to a girl who is dumb but who reminds me of

peach blossoms. . . . I guess I am too soft-hearted, Joe. I ought to have been a rabbi."

"Yes, you're soft-hearted," Sirrine snorted. "Like a traffic cop! You kid poor girls along for your own amusement, feed your sentimentality on other people's ambitions, produce plays on other people's money——"

"Well, you couldn't help making money in the Coolidge bull market; and what you lost in the last Louis Wallfish production you would have lost anyway in the November crash. . . . But as for the next production, I don't see how we can do that piece of Carter's without Elise Lamont. The girl in it is just one of these dumb helpless southern girls——"

"Like this Cressida Parr?" Sirrine suggested.

"Like ten thousand girls in this town. New York is full of helpless southern girls; though when you come to find out, a lot of them are not as helpless as they look. People will not pay their money just to see a dumb helpless southern girl; they can stand on the street corner and do that. . . . But in the third act, Joe, this girl of Carter's is not just a dumb helpless girl. She is every woman whose lover has done his best, for her and for himself, and his best is not good enough. And that takes an actress, Joe. You can find a thousand girls who could walk through the first two acts, in that part, just being themselves. But for the third act—— No, if we can't get Lamont that is out."

Sirrine pondered, his chin propped on his stick.

"What else have you got on hand?" he inquired.

"Nothing that you would want to buy into. My

other backers—well, do you know Mrs. Hoppner, the brewer's widow? She is forty-seven and she weighs a hundred and seventy. She would put a million dollars behind a play about a fat woman of forty-seven who makes herself more beautiful and fascinating than her husband's mistress."

"You shouldn't have much trouble finding a script to suit her."

"I give you my word, I have read a hundred! Here is one——" Wallfish opened a desk drawer, lifted a blue-jacketed manuscript. *"Second Ecstasy.* It is not so bad as you might think, not so bad as the rest; but I would hate to see it called a Louis Wallfish production."

"Then let's hope we can get Lamont for this piece of Carter's," said Sirrine, and left him.

But in the cold sunlight of Broadway he turned aside into a cigar store and shut himself in a telephone booth.

"Circle 11291. . . . Miss Parr, please. . . . Oh, Miss Parr, this is Joe Sirrine. It was delightful to meet you again, in Wallfish's office. I'm interested in some of his productions, you know. I was wondering if we couldn't talk things over. . . . Well, could you have tea with me?"

III

A blond young man sat scowling in the parlor of a rooming house just off Eighth Avenue. He looked like a bond salesman, which he was; he looked worried,

indignant, and hungry, and he was all of that too; for Cressida was three-quarters of an hour late for her dinner engagement. When at last he heard her cooing laughter outside, he knew she was telling some other man good-by. A last blithe "Till Monday, then," and he heard her skipping up the steps; the door slammed behind her, she burst in, flushed and smiling. For the last half-hour he had been compiling an anthology of the things he was going to say to her; but he forgot them all when she kissed him, lavishly.

"Oh, Ted darling, I know I'm terribly late. But I've been having tea——"

"You have not; you've been having Daiquiri cocktails. I'd meant to buy you one myself—the best Daiquiri in New York. But——"

"But, darling, you can buy me another—two more. I've only had two, and you know my limit is four in one day. . . . Oh, I've got lots of lovely news for you. . . . No, I haven't got a part yet, but Wallfish told me to come back next week——"

"That's an old story," he muttered as they went out.

"Yes, but this time he means it. This man I've been having tea with is associated with Wallfish; and if they can only get Miss Lamont for that new play of Carter's—— Well, he practically promised that I could play the sister—the second-best part." They turned a corner; his lack of enthusiasm nettled her. "Where are we going?" she asked.

"A new place, around on Forty-eighth Street. I was there last night with one of our vice-presidents. . . . I've got some news myself, Cress. Big news."

Its bigness silenced him; it was nothing to talk about on the street. She was silent too, and resentful, till he led her aside, down into an areaway, and pushed the bell at an iron grille.

"This place is pretty select," he told her proudly as a stout man opened the door. "Hello, Silvio."

"Of all things!" Cressida gasped. "You didn't expect to see me back so soon, did you, Silvio? . . . Ted, this is the very place where I had tea with Mr. Sirrine!"

He stood still in the narrow entry, glowering at her.

"Sirrine? Not Joe Sirrine, the speculator? Yes, I've heard that he finances some of Wallfish's productions. . . . Good God, Cress! Why, he's rotten—the worst woman chaser in Wall Street! If he's talking about a part for you, in a show he's interested in——"

"Do you think that after five years on Broadway I don't know how to handle woman chasers, and dodge parts with strings to them? I'm not a schoolgirl from the sticks! . . . Besides, there's nothing like that at all. I've met Mr. Sirrine before, and he's charming. He said they'd had trouble casting the part, but that I was the type. Now are you going to sit down and order me a drink? Because if you won't I'll order one myself, and you can go out and eat at Child's."

That brought him down, as she knew it would. Over the hors-d'œuvres he began to tell her his big news.

"Our company's going in for a big expansion, Cress—opening new offices all over the country. That's why they've delayed that promotion we've been waiting for; they're going to make me manager, at Little

Rock. I get a percentage of the profits over a certain amount; but the salary, right from the start, is enough for us to marry on——"

"Little Rock," she interrupted. "That's in Texas, isn't it?"

"Arkansas. Why?" The violet eyes were moist, starry, desolate.

"But, Ted! I'd have to give up my career! You always said——"

"I know, but I hadn't expected anything like this. . . . It's all right, Cress. If I make good there they'll bring me back to New York in a few years——"

"Do you think I'd be able to pick up my contacts again, after years in Little Rock? It would have been lovely if we could have gone on together, here in New York. Can't you refuse this—wait for a promotion in the home office?"

"Lord, no! If I turn this down I might as well resign. This is my big chance, you see, in my career——"

"And you wouldn't give it up for me. But you expect me to give up mine for you. That's not fair!"

"It's not the same thing, Cress. You haven't got anywhere with your career. You might as well——"

"If you loved me," she said with a catch in her voice, "you wouldn't insult me by practically saying that I'm no good." She stood up. "I don't want any coffee; I'm going home. . . . No, I don't want you to take me home. I won't let you take me home. Don't you think I can find my way home alone, after five years on Broadway?"

IV

That was on Friday. The Saturday morning papers carried the announcement of the opening of a dozen branches, from coast to coast, by the Cameron Securities Company. On Saturday evening Sirrine took Cressida to dinner at the Ritz, and to a revue, and to a party afterward at somebody's studio. Much can be done with a $14.75 evening gown reduced to $9.95, if you know how; especially if you have wistful violet eyes, and a desperate feeling that the only thing left is to laugh and have a good time. Cressida danced with three producers, who had never said anything to her before except that there was nothing at present. This evening they talked as if there was much at present and more in the future. Two of them asked for her telephone number (which their offices had had, or were supposed to have had, on file for years). The third remembered that Joe Sirrine was always jealous of his girls, and had won an amateur boxing championship.

On Tuesday Cressida had tea with Sirrine, in his apartment, where the cold sunlight drifting in through studio windows was paled by the glow of a log fire. He was suave, amusing, faultless. He kissed her—but not in his apartment; not till he had taken her home, and stood with her in the vestibule. He kissed her gravely, reverently, wistfully; she could see him wishing he had met a girl like her before he got into that unfortunate marriage he had told her about.

On Wednesday she dined with him, and went to a play, and to a night club afterward. She was feeling rather desperate, for she hadn't heard a word from Ted. If Sirrine kissed her to-night, she didn't know what would happen. . . . He didn't; he stood in the vestibule a moment, visibly wanting to kiss her, and then turned away with a stifled groan. Cressida was sorry for him.

The next day she was sorry for herself. No bright cold sunlight that morning; from dark gray skies fell a wet snow, that turned to slush underfoot. Her high overshoes were trim and smart, but they leaked; her feet were wet through by the time she had walked from the subway to Mrs. Eier's apartment. And there she learned that Mrs. Eier had decided that peace could be advocated just as well from Palm Beach in this weather; also that she would not feel justified in paying a part-time secretary's railroad fare, and living expenses at the Breakers.

If it had been Ted who came to see Cressida that afternoon—— But Ted was in conference with the executives of his firm. The man who came, and took her to tea in his apartment, was Joe Sirrine. . . . He agreed with her, looking out of the huge windows while she sat beside the fire, that New York was unendurable in this weather; he had decided to go down to Havana for a month or so—till rehearsals started on the Carter play. And then, turning back to her—

"You know I wish I could take you with me!" he said savagely. "Cress, I love you, I need you. I'm wild about you. . . . But I'm not free."

She'd been expecting that, of course; she thought it was brave of him to have restrained his feelings so long as this. She had rehearsed the lines in which she would refuse him—gravely, regretfully, with a touch of tenderness that would be balm to his wounds. Here was her cue, and she'd forgotten the lines. . . . For he had confessed that he needed her. She needed somebody to need her; somebody who wasn't so intent on his own career that he despised hers, somebody who was mature enough not to let a silly quarrel spoil everything. Her refusal was going to hurt him. Of course she was going to refuse, she told herself as she sat speechless; but——

But he gave her no chance. He had picked up the telephone.

"Have my car sent around, please." He came back to her, but he didn't touch her. "Dearest, I'm going to send you home—alone. I—I can't trust myself, just now. But to-morrow we'll have tea, if you like—at Silvio's. . . . There's only one thing I ask of you, Cress, in these few days before I go. Just let me see you, talk to you, look at you——"

Not like Ted, who wouldn't talk to her unless she would agree with him. . . . She was desperately sorry for Sirrine, but he wouldn't let her kiss him good-by. Protecting me, she thought miserably. He's had lots of girls; he wouldn't act like this unless he was really in love. . . .

She thought it was rather wonderful to have awakened so deep and fine an emotion in a man who had known many passing fancies; she supposed that only

an extraordinary woman could have done it. She wondered, with a not unpleasant anticipatory terror, if she dared risk another tea with him, even at Silvio's; she doubted if she'd stop with the fourth cocktail, if she were still nervous and upset to-morrow. . . . But she could trust him; this afternoon he had—well, not exactly saved her from herself, of course, but something like it. It would be sheer cruelty to doubt him now, to be cold to him when he asked so little.

She didn't know that he had called up Mrs. Eier's that morning and learned that she was out of a job; she didn't dream that it was a point of pride, with him, never to ask a woman. He knew how to make them ask him.

V

Ted called her up the next afternoon.

"Cress, they've just told me that I've got to start for Little Rock to-morrow. I'm coming right uptown; let's go out for tea, and——"

"I've got a date for tea." That was automatic; her mind had been paralyzed ever since she heard his voice.

"Break it, then. If you're coming with me you won't have time——"

"Whatever made you think I was coming with you?" Here was a golden opening, but Ted never saw it. "After the way you acted the other night——" she said. "And you never even called me up, all this week!"

"I thought I'd give you time to cool off—see things sensibly. I'm sorry I was so—so tactless; but you see I'm right, don't you? There's no sense letting people like Wallfish keep you dangling, with promises that never come true."

"I thought," she said, "that when you asked me to give up my career you were paying me a compliment. Asking me to give up something of value, for something else that might be worth more. But if you don't think I'd be giving up anything at all—— Well, you just don't know! And if you think I'd give up a good part in that play of Carter's for a man who despises me and my work——"

She discovered that she was shrieking that. She slammed the receiver on the hook, leaned shuddering against the wall. If Ted had been beside her, then—— But Ted was down in Wall Street. Wearily she went back to her room to make up her face for Joe Sirrine.

And Ted, as he came uptown in the subway, was trying to assimilate two incredible facts. . . . She wasn't going with him. She had to go with him! What would she do, alone in New York——?

But she seemed to think she'd do pretty well; and maybe she was right. Ted had thought of her for so long as a lovable little incompetent that it came hard to realize that he might have been mistaken. But she certainly seemed positive that she was to get a good part at last. . . . Through Joe Sirrine. . . . Ted couldn't believe it but he knew that one man could tell him, surely. He got out of the subway at Fiftieth

Street; two minutes later he ran up a stairway, strode past Izzy the office boy, and walked into the presence of Louis Wallfish.

"My name's Briscoe," he announced. "T. A. Briscoe, of the Cameron Securities Company."

"Izzy!" Wallfish called. "Are you so dumb you can't tell an actor out of work from a bond salesman?"

"I don't want to sell you anything!" Ted growled. "I want to know if it's true that you're going to give Cressida Parr a good part—a really good part—in your next production."

"And what is that to you, my young friend?"

"We're engaged to be married. Or we were. . . . My firm's sending me to Arkansas. I want her to go with me; I don't believe she'll ever get anywhere on Broadway. But you keep telling her to come back next week, and a man named Joe Sirrine keeps telling her you're going to give her the second-best part in that play of Carter's——"

"Oh, he does, does he? I pick my own casts. Not Joe Sirrine!"

"That's what I told her. I said there was no use of her hoping for a career. I said she'd better come with me."

Wallfish looked at him compassionately.

"Young man, excuse me, but your technique is terrible. You do not say, 'Dearest, I know you have genius—you will be a Barrymore, a Bernhardt, a Duse; yet I ask you to give up all that for our great love.' No. You say, 'Well, maybe you had better marry

me; at least it would not be so bad as starving in the gutter.' You do not deserve so splendid an artist as Cressida Parr."

"Splendid artist?" Ted exploded. "Then she really has a future?"

Louis Wallfish looked out at the sunshine, chill but bright, that had come back to Broadway.

"I don't know whether she has a future," he said. "I don't even know whether I have a future. The show business has been something terrible, this season. But she has talent—great talent. If I produce that Carter play, she shall have a good part." He shook a monitory finger at Ted Briscoe. "And young man, I will not have my plans upset to suit your convenience! I need her for that Carter play. You needn't think you are going to take her by storm and carry her off to Arkansas!"

"That's exactly what I'm going to do," said Ted grimly. "Whether it upsets your plans or not!" He picked up the telephone. "Circle 11291!" he snapped. Then—— "Miss Parr, please." He replaced the instrument, looked dully at Wallfish. "She's gone out to tea," he said. "Probably with——" He choked off the rest.

"Cheer up. She is the kind of girl who comes back for dinner."

"Dinner?" Ted cried. "But that's two hours! While I'm waiting——"

"While you are waiting," said Louis Wallfish, "you had better go somewhere and have a drink. You need

it. I would buy you one myself, to solace your disappointment at not being able to take her with you; but I have a date to meet a man over at the Park Lane at five o'clock."

"Solace my disappointment?" Ted growled. "You wait and see. . . . And if—if she happens to call up, would you mind telling her that she can find me around at Silvio's, on Forty-eighth Street?"

He went out. Louis Wallfish, taking his hat and overcoat off the rack, caught the last of a vanishing grin on the face of Izzy the office boy.

"Izzy!" he said severely. "Some day you will be a producer yourself, and maybe a better one than I am. So I will give you some advice for your future career. You know Cressida Parr; you know what I think about her. And now you think I am crazy. . . . Well, Izzy, you are wrong. It is all girls like her have got, this faith in themselves. Sometimes I think it is about all any of us have got. If she marries this boy—and I hope to God she does, for if she doesn't I will surely have to make good my bluff and cast her—but if she marries this boy, it will always do her good to think how much she gave up for him. Yes, and it will keep him up on his toes, too. And if she doesn't—— Well, this faith keeps her happy; it makes her a good trouper even if she is a bad actress. We must all keep up a front in this business, Izzy; remember that. You may double-cross men and women and get by with it, but you can't afford to throw down the show business. . . . And if Joe

Sirrine calls up, you tell him I want to see him. I will show him who does the casting, for a Louis Wallfish production."

He went out to Broadway, hailed a taxi.

"All the same," he muttered to himself as his car started eastward, "I ought to have been a rabbi. All this good advice I give away for nothing. A rabbi would get paid for it."

VI

From the stream of automobiles speeding eastward on Forty-eighth Street a limousine drew out, disembarked Joe Sirrine and Cressida Parr on the curb before Silvio's. The iron grille opened as they stepped down into the areaway; a man and a woman came out. Sirrine knew them—a Mr. Ballard who had profited greatly from the stock market, a girl named Yvonne Something-or-Other who had profited greatly from Mr. Ballard.

"Goin' in?" Ballard asked. "We'll go back with you. Buy the girls a lil drink. Lil drink never hurts a girl. Livens 'em up."

Over his shoulder Sirrine saw disgust in Cressida's eyes.

"No, you two run along, Ballard. Miss Parr and I——"

"Never mind where you and Miss Parr are goin' afterward. You can have a lil drink first."

Cressida shuddered; Sirrine tried to draw away. But just then a blond young man came down into the

areaway, and started to push past them toward the grille—and halted, staring incredulously.

"Cress!" he cried. She turned to him in unconcealable relief; he caught her hands. The bibulous Ballard turned on him, red with rage.

"Here, you! Keep your hands off our women!"

"*Your* women?" Ted screamed.

For what followed, Joe Sirrine could not be blamed. He wanted to knock Ballard down, but the girls were in his way. Before he could hit Ballard Ted Briscoe had gone into action—but not against Ballard; against the man who had let Cressida be proclaimed his woman. Ted's fist smashed against Sirrine's nose; Sirrine staggered, he tasted blood—and then he forgot everything but his pain and his chagrin. He blocked Ted's wild swings with the cool masterfulness of the expert; he drove into Ted, a governed whirlwind of lashing fists. Ted rocked from side to side, he staggered, he went down. On the cold asphalt of the areaway, he lay still.

From the motionless motor cars that packed the street, halted by the red light at the corner, a dozen people thrust out peering heads as Cressida gave a scream—shrill, desolate, despairing. Louis Wallfish looked out of his taxi in time to see her drop on her knees beside Ted, to see her look up at Sirrine with the bitter futile defiance of a woman whose lover has done his best, for her and for himself—a best that is not good enough. . . .

The red light turned green; the motionless cars leaped forward, sped on. Wallfish's taxi had passed

the corner before he came out of his trance and began to hammer on the closed window behind the driver.

"Hey! Hey! Let me out!"

But the car had passed another corner before the driver heard him and drew in to the curb. Wallfish flung him a dollar bill and turned back, running. . . . But the light had turned red again, and it isn't so easy to cross Seventh Avenue and Broadway against the traffic, at the rush hour. By the time Wallfish had come back to the areaway in front of Silvio's no one was in sight. He rang the bell, imperiously.

"Silvio!" he said, when a face peered through the grille. "Where is Cressida Parr?"

"Miss Parr? She hasn't been here to-day."

"She was right out here in front. Two men fought over her; one of them was Joe Sirrine. Is he inside?"

"No, Mr. Wallfish. He ain't nor she ain't either. As for a fight——" said Silvio, with a trace of acrimony. "People who come here don't fight, Mr. Wallfish. And am I responsible for what any bunch of bums may do on the pavement?"

"Let me in," Wallfish growled. "I want to telephone."

In the entry, he dropped his nickel in the slot, took off the receiver.

"Circle——" He broke off; what *was* that number? Cressida Parr had given it to him; he'd let her suppose he kept it on file; he'd heard Ted Briscoe giving it at his own telephone, not an hour ago. But he hadn't paid any attention. . . . Who the devil would ever have supposed I would need her telephone num-

ber? he reflected as he slammed the receiver back on the hook.

VII

Scowling and sullen, Sirrine came next day to Wallfish's office.

"I got blotto last night," he announced. "And when I came to this morning I found about twenty phone calls from you. What do you want?"

"I wanted to find out where I could reach Cressida Parr."

"Cressida Parr? The last I saw of her, the last I ever want to see of her," said Sirrine viciously, "she was throwing that goofy lover of hers into a taxi. Having told me, at some length, what she thought of me. Louis, the girl surprised me; she even surprised Yvonne. She has certainly kept her ears open at rehearsals. . . . What did you want with her?"

"Joe, I am a fool," Wallfish sighed. "I have made the mistake of my life. This girl had something——"

"A lot," Sirrine agreed. "Including a most amazing vocabulary."

"She had more than that. . . . You have been after her, Joe. You could get plenty of women who are more beautiful, who have more brains, more fire. Yet there was something about her that made you want her; something that made me think of peach blossoms, and a girl who used to meet me in a peach orchard back in Sedalia. If she could do that to a couple of old-timers like you and me, Joe, she has got all we need for the first two acts of that play of Carter's.

For the lead! Let Brady keep Lamont; Cressida Parr could walk through those first two acts, just being herself!"

"But the third act——" Sirrine began.

"There too she could be herself! Joe, let her give such a scream as she gave when you knocked that boy out; let her look as she looked up at you, let her fall back on her dead lover's body, as she fell back on him just as those damned traffic lights changed and my taxi went on—— Joe, she would be a smash!"

"Well, you can have her," said Joe Sirrine. "If she's as good as all that somebody else will back you, and her, in that play of Carter's. I never want to set eyes on her again. But you can call her up——"

"Do you think I haven't tried? Last night I tried to reach her, everywhere I could think of. But the one place I didn't think of was the Little Church around the Corner. . . . Yes, Joe, she is gone. Gone to Little Rock—she telephoned me this morning from the train. Gone with that boy you knocked out, and she took away to wash off and bandage up. And I bet you that this morning, he thinks he took her by storm. . . . What I have missed, what I have missed! But maybe it is just as well," Wallfish finished with resignation. "She wasn't acting, she was just being herself. And I could hardly have you beat up her lover in the wings every night, just so she would let out that scream."

But when Sirrine had gone Wallfish sat still, shaking his head sadly; and presently he went out to the outer

office in time to catch the last of a vanishing grin on the face of Izzy the office boy.

"Yes, Izzy, you are right," he sighed. "I ought to have been a rabbi. Then maybe they would have let me perform the marriage ceremony, and paid me ten dollars for it. I will need ten dollars before long, if I go on pulling boners like this. . . . Izzy! Call up Mrs. Hoppner. Ask her if she will come down this afternoon, and look at a play called *Second Ecstasy.*"

SHARPSHOOTER

DISCRETION is the rule of every proper suburb. People flirt, but they keep within bounds; for everybody knows that in the pinch you'd have to cut out the nonsense and stick together for the children's sake. Besides, you can't afford a really decisive, disastrous affair in a place like Manorwood. Everybody has to keep up a front, and the nearer the ragged edge you establish your front the higher you must build it, to hide what lies behind. Just about the time you've met that payment on the second mortgage you're stuck with a sewer assessment; the entertainment bill is terrific for those big parties everybody simply has to throw at the club; your car must be of respectable make and respectably recent model, your wife's fur coat must look about as costly as the fur coats of other men's wives. With all that to carry, nobody can afford such luxuries as alimony and counsel fees.

So it was in Manorwood, for every one but Bill and Maida Partland. They were rich enough to afford anything, tempestuous enough to be capable of anything; and yet, for years, they were Manorwood's model pair.

When any of Maida's friends made a remark that sounded faintly envious, she used to say quite simply that she had been very fortunate. She certainly had.

In the first place—you had to put this first, in Manorwood—she had money of her own, besides Bill's million or two. She'd met him at Miami Beach, where he was considerably beset by women; and two days after he saw her they were engaged. A quick-combustion affair like that makes you rather proud of yourself, if it turns out well; and for years their contentment was the envy of Manorwood. Bill was away from home a good deal, at training camps and pistol tournaments—he was a major in the reserves and an ex-president of the National Pistol Association; but when he wasn't out of town he was home all day. And they were so happy that Maida didn't mind even that, till he began lapping up the old brandy.

With all their money they wouldn't have lived in Manorwood, where they overshadowed everybody, if Bill hadn't inherited an estate on the edge of town; an estate that he loved, laid out by his father on the banks of the Sound, when the site of Manorwood was only thickets. A big house and eight or ten acres, with huge oaks towering above smooth lawns, and room farther back for Bill's private pistol range. Hours after all the other husbands in town had caught the eight-twenty-seven for the office you could hear him popping away at his targets.

Didn't he do anything else? Oh, yes; he engaged in some curious and unremunerative occupations. He gave a great deal of time to his duties, whatever they were, as a reserve officer; and he had more to do with county politics than you would have suspected from his silent aloofness. He never made a speech at a

rally and nobody ever saw him shaking hands at a political club, but in the back room what he said counted. The county officials in those days may not have been models of probity and ability, but they were a great deal less bad than they might have been if Bill Partland hadn't helped pick them out.

People didn't exactly like Bill, because he rarely let them know him well enough; but the men respected him, and the women—— Bill was handsome in a dark saturnine style; he played games well, he danced lightly. There was more than one woman in Manorwood whose eyes had rested on him thoughtfully—and she wasn't thinking about his money, either. But Bill never saw women; he was always sighting along the barrel of a pistol, or—after the first few years—looking down into a glass of brandy and soda.

In winter the Partlands—when they weren't in Florida—did their entertaining at the club, like everybody else; and they carefully saw to it that they didn't entertain more sumptuously than their neighbors who lived on the ragged edge. Decent of them, of course; but just because every one knew they had money, their moderation seemed a little ostentatious. It wasn't so bad in summer, when they entertained at home; with their spacious lawns, and their turf tennis courts, and their private bathing beach that was so much better than the hand-made strip of pebbly sand beside the club pier. Even men who were beginning to say that Bill was going too hard on the old brandy never refused it at his parties.

So Maida was really very fortunate; and she ad-

mitted it with the unaffected simplicity that was part of her charm. And if, eventually, the other women began to say that there was a touch of arrogance about her, who could wonder at it? She didn't mean to be arrogant, but she had everything and she knew it—money and health, a handsome husband and lovely children. She wanted children and she could afford them, so she had four in seven years. That kept her busy, but thanks to a good constitution and plenty of exercise, and money that could buy the best of care, she came through it with her nerves and her figure almost unimpaired. Indeed most people found her more attractive as a matron than as a bride. She had poise and dignity now, a serene assurance; her clear gray eyes beneath her sunny brown hair looked straight into yours with a simplicity, a fearless candor, that hardly deserved to be called arrogance, even if it did reveal rather too keen a sense of security. Her youngest child was a year old before those clear eyes began to be, ever so faintly, clouded.

For Maida's job was done. She had borne her children—healthy, beautiful children; but it was absurd to pretend that she could care for them as well as the expensive experts she and Bill had hired. She tried to take charge, in nursery illnesses, but had to admit that she was only in the way. Her job was done—and she was only twenty-seven, healthier and prettier than ever, tingling with an eagerness to find out what had been going on while she had been doing her duty to society. And the first thing she discovered was that Bill, to whom she hadn't paid much

attention of late years because you could be so sure he didn't need it, had gone off somewhere into the silences.

Not bodily, of course; he was still around the house, and he used to look at her with the mask of polite attention that he wore on his semiannual visit to church. Maida recognized that look; but she didn't realize that it was the look she had turned on him for years, when he came to her for some obscure spiritual reassurance. It was so absurd to think of Bill needing reassurance, or anything else, that Maida had come to be a little absent-minded in her relations with her husband. She was ready enough with caresses, but her attention was left behind in the nursery.

Yet Bill had needed her sometimes—needed her spiritually; needed her and hadn't found her. But he knew where to find the brandy; it might not give him what he wanted but it gave him all he could get around home. So he had retired into a realm of politely alcoholic silences, and when Maida looked for him she couldn't find him.

She spent months in the search, at first in amused perplexity, then in growing alarm, finally with scornful resentment. But all she could be sure of was that he was drinking too much. She told him so, with an uncontrollable violence that astounded her and (she surmised afterward) must have disgusted him; she didn't know, nor did he, that she was violent precisely because she couldn't find out why he was drinking too much. But he certainly was; and his dour morose face was before her eyes all day, instead

of being decently buried in the office like other husbands' grouches. Since there seemed to be nothing she could do, she put away her resentment by an effort of will; at least she persuaded herself she had put it away. She stiffened; she grew a little aloof, and a shade more arrogant.

Her technique was all wrong, of course; but she'd never had to pursue a man before, and she didn't realize that the man you've been living with for years must be stalked with somewhat more subtlety than a stranger. In short she had been a little too fortunate. So she behaved rather like a fool, and so did Bill. So do most people, sometimes.

But Jerry Delehunt was never a fool. Other things, but not that.

II

Jerry was responsible for most of what happened in Manorwood, or at least for what got talked about; but nobody ever blamed him. Maida had known him for years; he was an actor, and lived at the Manorwood Club of summers. But they had the merest casual acquaintance; Jerry never needed to waste his afternoons on a woman who was always in the nursery. He had been a choir-boy when he was ten years old and he still looked like a choir-boy at thirty-odd, with long golden hair brushed straight back, and cheeks of almost infantile pinkness, and wistful, appealing blue eyes. Uncle Tad Melburn, the only other bachelor in Manorwood, used to call him the Harmless Necessary Cat.

That was hardly fair to a man who had played football at Holy Cross and won a D. S. C. in the Argonne for wrecking a German machine-gun crew with his pistol, and could still shoot just under Bill Partland's almost perfect score in the Fourth-of-July matches on Bill's private range. It was Uncle Tad's theory that Jerry was a public utility; he gave the wives of Manorwood the thrill of a double life, a feeling that they were romantic women—romantic with a touch of tragedy. And he never did any real harm. So, at least, said Uncle Tad, who could never bring himself to believe that what was uncomfortable could be true. Several women might have told him that Jerry wasn't as harmless as he looked, but they kept these matters to themselves. Even Mrs. de Armond meant to keep it to herself, till the night Jerry brought her home just before daylight and they found her husband waiting up for her.

Sam de Armond was fifteen years older than Jerry and thirty pounds lighter, so he said nothing till Jerry had gone away. Then he said much, in a tone of voice that carried through the stillness of dawn to all the neighbors. People who weren't awakened by the quarrel were called out of bed by telephone, thanks to thoughtful friends who didn't want anybody to miss this.

A dozen families were listening in when Thea de Armond, on her knees before the muzzle of a pistol, Told All. . . . But no shots were fired; and the next day Jerry moved back to town, as he had long intended —he lived at the Algonquin in the winter; and the

de Armonds carried on as if nothing at all had happened.

None the less, there was a general feeling that this was too much. Thea and Jerry had broken the first and great commandment: Thou Shalt Not Become Conspicuous. People began to say that Jerry had better spend next summer at Long Beach or Westport instead of Manorwood.

"But that's rot," said Maida Partland at a bridge luncheon where the topic was debated. "Thea was always a fool; you can't tell me Jerry had to lead her astray. If a woman makes a show of herself she's got to expect a row with her husband. Who's going to cry over her if she gets it? I'm not." Her clipped decisive voice shot out the words with arrogant assurance. "And I guess she knew Sam wouldn't use that gun."

"Just the same," said Helen Venable, "it isn't fair. If Sam had thrown her out Jerry couldn't have married her." (Jerry had been married at twenty-one, and his wife had got herself a separation—one of those demi-divorces that gentlemen with a taste for philandering find so convenient.) "He never risks anything—unless some day he runs up against a shooting husband. He's only betting stage money." (Mrs. Venable herself had had an attack of Jerryitis, but a mild one; she had got over it early, and it left no scars.)

"Well?" Maida shrugged. "Thea knew that before it all started."

This was in October, while she was still in the amused-perplexity stage of her quest for Bill.

III

It was the end of May when she met Jerry on the Avenue. She'd been shopping in town and meant to catch the four-twenty-two home; she'd have passed him with a nod if he hadn't stopped her.

"Fancy seeing you!" he said. There was a shy apologetic good humor about him, like a tail-wagging dog that rather hopes to be patted in spite of all his transgressions. "I'd almost decided to write you, Mrs. Partland, and ask if you couldn't come in town for tea. I need your help."

His wistful eyes told her that he really did. So Maida, mildly wondering, went to tea with him, and learned that he wanted her opinion as to whether he ought to come back to Manorwood that summer.

"I know they've—read me out of the party," he admitted. "I have my spies in Manorwood—not women—and I heard that you were the only one who was willing to give me the benefit of the doubt."

"I wasn't thinking of you," Maida told him.

"I know that. Just because of that, and because we don't know each other well, I dare to ask you. And because you're—different."

This proved his insight to Maida, who had often felt that she was different. Through the blue curl of cigarette smoke she studied his strained boyish face. Nice to feel that somebody needed her, if only for a moment; somebody whose need couldn't be satisfied by brandy. It made her heart beat in nervous synco-

pation, like the gusty music of the orchestra playing on the balcony of the tea room.

"What you do is none of my business," she said. "But it makes me sick to see a woman who's old enough to know what she's doing, and hasn't got the nerve to take her medicine when she's let herself in for it. I hate people who start out with a hurrah and then crack under the strain. . . . Sorry; I didn't mean to abuse a friend of yours."

"Thea? Oh, she's dropped me," he sighed. "I—— Oh, I've been an awful fool, but it's not as bad as you think. I mean I didn't—— Oh, well! Never mind."

Maida could see that he was shielding Thea; probably it had all been her fault.

"Certainly you'll come back to Manorwood," she said. "Why not?"

"I've been such a fool. . . . But, damn it, I won't run away!"

"Of course you won't," said Maida. "Some people wanted to put you out of the club, but they didn't. They never do. You come back, and Bill and I will throw a dinner for you the first week. We'll see if anybody declines the invitation. . . . Now tell me—what have you been doing all winter? You don't mind talking while we dance?"

So Jerry came back and the Partlands gave a dinner. Maida invited by telephone, as usual; she managed to remark casually to everybody that Jerry was going to be there; and nobody declined. Jerry outstayed the other guests; but when Bill left him talking

to Maida on the veranda and walked off into the library, Jerry followed; and Maida came in presently to find Bill's brandy high-ball untouched on the library table, while Jerry talked technicalities of pistol mechanism with him in the gun room. Jerry said good night, then, and her eyes thanked him. Other men might have tried to help her, but only a man who shared Bill's interest in pistols could have done it; and no one but Jerry could have done it so unobtrusively.

That dinner rehabilitated him; but to emphasize it Maida went swimming with him the next afternoon. (Bill might have gone too, but he was off at the county seat on some political errand.) At the club dock you had to bathe in the two or three hours around high tide, at the Partlands' private beach beyond the point the swimming was good at all hours. But Maida drove down to the club that afternoon and swam with Jerry under the eyes of all the wives and children in Manorwood. She swam with him, and lazed on the float with him, and kept pace with him in some rather startling dives; and thirty-eight women gasped.

Seven of them reflected: "Well! I wonder what he's saying to *her*."

IV

Now the joke of it—if you call it a joke, as most people did at first—was that what Jerry began saying to her that afternoon, and went on saying, was exactly what he had said to all the other women, all he knew how to say. It wasn't a new line by any means;

it probably originated about 25,000 B. C., when the first leisured male of the tribe took to dropping around to the cave of afternoons while Father was out mammoth-hunting. But it was all new to Maida, who had married at nineteen and buried herself in the nursery.

At first she rather laughed at him; and presently she told herself that she let this go on only because—— With a certain self-disdain, she perceived that she had hoped it might bring Bill back. But Bill continued to be absently polite to her, and to Jerry; and she realized that he could do nothing else. He had a code—old-fashioned, perhaps, but he stuck to it. It was beneath his dignity and hers for him to compete for his wife's attention, or even admit that it had wandered. A fine code—while it lasts; it wouldn't permit Bill to say a word. He might do something, if the time ever came; but Maida kept her thoughts away from the future. . . . And then, in a sudden rush of incredible emotion, she discovered that it didn't matter what Bill did.

It took her three weeks to get that far, but already she had damned herself in the eyes of Manorwood. There was nothing furtive about Maida; she had no discretion for she'd never needed it before; what she did she did in the open. She swam with Jerry, she drove with Jerry, she played golf with Jerry; and twice she came down to the club to dine and dance with Jerry, on nights when Bill was at home. Even Thea de Armond had never gone that far.

It was becoming a scandal, but nothing could be done about it. The de Armonds had lived all winter

in an atmosphere of electric refrigeration, but you couldn't freeze out the Partlands. Nor indeed did Manorwood want to do anything about it, just yet; everybody was having too much fun. Maida who had always had that arrogant assurance, Bill whose mask of politeness hardly veiled his morose indifference—let them sizzle, Manorwood agreed. It served them right for daring to have more money than other people. Yet one or two persons thought otherwise; Mrs. Venable, for instance.

"Somebody ought to talk to her," she told Uncle Tad Melburn. "I don't believe this utter shamelessness of hers is anything but inexperience; she's only playing around and she doesn't know how. But somebody ought to tell her——"

"Meaning me?" Uncle Tad interrupted. "Look here, Helen, I'm sixty-four. I know what's my business and what isn't."

"So do I," Mrs. Venable sighed. "All the same, I think it's rotten for everybody to sit around and laugh. If she's only making a fool of herself because she doesn't know the rules—— But maybe she means it."

"Oh, no, Helen! She'd think of the children."

"She doesn't need to. Not like the rest of us, I mean, with all that raft of nurses and governesses. She could afford a divorce. . . . But Bill—— He's not Sam de Armond. If he ever pointed a pistol he'd pull the trigger. He wouldn't miss, either."

"Come, now, Helen! People don't do that sort of thing."

"Don't they? Go read the papers. . . . Besides, Bill's always half stewed. You can't tell what a man may do when he's soaked in brandy."

"Well, well!" said Uncle Tad uncomfortably. "I can't believe it will come to that."

"You never can," she flung at him. "But sometimes it does."

V

Saturday night, and a dance at the club. Bill Partland had stayed at home, working on some army papers; he couldn't do it to-morrow because he and Maida were giving a swim-and-luncheon party. So she drove down alone in the roadster, and between dances Jerry led her out to it. There were some forty cars in the parking space, and in at least half of them, Maida knew, people who were married to other people were making love—with discretion. Her sun-browned shoulders twitched above her silver-green dress; she wasn't one of that lot.

So they strolled out to the end of the pier. Jerry found the switch that turned off the big lamp above the landing stage; in the dim light from the distant windows of the club, they looked at each other; on a bench above the lapping water she sank into his arms.

"I didn't know things like this happened," she said at last. There was no arrogance in her voice now; only wonder, and a touch of fear.

"They never did, before. . . . Oh Maida, Maida! If only this had happened while I was still—— I've been such a dreadful fool——"

"That doesn't matter." Her eyes roved across the water, glassy gray under the stars. "I'd like to swim out with you," she said. "And never come back." She didn't know the Freudian dialect, but he did.

"Maida!" His voice was tense and gusty. "Other people will be coming out here—there's such a mob, to-night. Come up to my room." She stirred, half rose. "For a drink," he added reassuringly. She sank back.

"A drink, eh?" She laughed. In the dusk her clear gray eyes were scornful; she had begun to measure him, in these three weeks. Not that that mattered either. "Jerry, do you want me?" A moment later she sprang up, trembling. "No, no!" she gasped. "Wait! Let me pull myself together." His blue eyes clung to her, wistful and longing. "I won't go up to your room," she said. "But to-morrow—— Damn it, I forgot that party. . . . Well, after that, if you want me——"

"You'll come to me?"

"I'll go with you—anywhere. For good. I can't stand this any longer. . . . But I'm not a betwixt-and-between, Jerry. When I do anything they can all know it."

"But, darling, you know I can't marry you."

She laughed wearily.

"Who asked you to marry me?"

"But it wouldn't be fair——"

"I'm not asking you to be fair, Jerry. I'm telling you that I'll go with you to-morrow, and stay with you—if you can take your medicine. Yours won't be

so bad. Mine——" She was silent a moment, thinking. Not of the children; they weren't hers, any more; they belonged to the nurses. Thinking of Bill. . . . "I'll take mine," she said with a shrug. "But I'm not Thea de Armond. People won't need to listen at the window to find out what I've done. . . . Well—do you want me that much?"

"Oh, Maida! My dearest! I think you can save me. If we could ever marry—— If my wife could be persuaded——"

He couldn't help reflecting that fifty thousand would persuade her. Maida would never miss that.

"Never mind that now," she said. "I don't know whether I'll save you or sink you, but I can't stand any more of this. You can't either. . . . At least I hope you can't. . . . Or Bill. He's never said anything, but of course he knows. I won't feel decent till we get this cleared up."

Gently, he caressed her hands.

"Dearest, I'm not sure I have the right to ask you——"

"I asked you," said Maida. "You only asked me to come up to your room. For a drink." She laughed. "You don't like the deep water, do you, Jerry? But it's the only place where I'll go swimming with you. . . . You'd better think it over till to-morrow. Because if you start you've got to go through with it."

"I can do anything, for you!" he vowed eagerly. A little too eagerly, she considered as they strolled back down the pier.

She was cool and assured as ever when her partner

claimed her for the next dance, but Jerry's nervous excitement told its story. At least to Helen Venable, with whom he was dancing; she stopped suddenly and led him off to the veranda.

"Now!" she said. "This isn't my job, but everybody else is too namby-pamby to do it. Jerry, this has got to stop. . . . Oh, don't look puzzled and hurt. You know what I mean."

"Helen, I want to tell you about it. You've always understood me——"

"I have," said Mrs. Venable. "Thank God."

"Well, I want you to know that this isn't like—like anything that ever happened before."

"I suppose," she said pensively, "you've said that not less than three hundred times in your life. You said it to me. . . . You've forgotten that, no doubt. But I remember it because that was when I began to laugh."

"I mean it!" he flared.

"You always mean it, Jerry. That's part of your charm."

"Helen, she's different." (This was the earnest pleading mood she knew.) "If I'd met her before—— Even yet, she may save my soul."

"As if that mattered," said Mrs. Venable. "Better think about saving your body. Bill Partland's a dead shot."

"Huh!" said Jerry, ruffling; too late, she saw that she had touched his sacrosanct vanity. "So am I. And Bill doesn't know what it feels like to shoot at a live target that can shoot back."

He left her damning herself for a bungling meddler; and damning him, too. Everybody knew it wasn't Bill Partland's fault that he had been kept in a training camp as pistol instructor all through the war.

VI

A number of people were surprised to see the de Armonds at the Partlands' swimming luncheon; possibly even Bill was surprised, though when Bill was surprised you never knew it. Maida hardly knew why she had asked them. Was it in obscure recognition that she and Thea de Armond were sisters under their skins? . . . But we're not, she told herself grimly; not by a good deal. She hoped Jerry understood that, by now.

There was no time for these abstruse speculations, anyway; she had to plan—plan to get the guests away decently early, plan for a last hour with the children before she left. . . . And then the final interview with Bill. After eight years, she still couldn't guess how he'd take the news. His terrific temper was pretty well under control, but once he'd almost killed a man who called him a crook in a political quarrel. And of course he'd be full of old brandy. . . .

But she met her guests with clear-eyed assurance, so cool and calm that Jerry was perplexed.

"Changed your mind?" he asked as they swam out beyond the floats.

"Not at all. If you think you can take your medicine——"

"I? Maida! With you I can do anything!"

She'd have to train him, she perceived, to be a little less positive and sweeping. She supposed she'd have to do a good deal of training. . . .

They came back to the float, and Jerry did some diving with Mrs. de Armond; she was making rather a point of her unsentimental comradely feeling for him. Some of the others had swum ashore; Maida relaxed on the float—and Bill came and sat beside her.

"Feeling rotten?" he asked in an undertone.

She shook her head. . . . So he'd seen something at last. If he'd seen it three weeks ago—even three weeks ago, before she discovered that things like this could happen——

"You want to take care of yourself, May," he told her. Queer how that absurd pet name hurt. "Anything I can do?"

"Not a thing," she said—rather harshly, because she had to swallow a lump in her throat. He dived off, swam ashore; at luncheon, she was disgusted by the avidity with which he consumed brandy cocktails.

But Jerry stayed with him, glass for glass, and the others stayed with Jerry. They'd forgotten that Bill's old brandy had twice the power of cut Scotch or kitchen-stove gin. Even Maida discovered that she was drinking more than usual. Rotten, she mused, to have to get up your courage for a break that way; rotten to finish one life and begin another with a drunken party like this. For they were all a little unsteady as they drifted out into the gun room, after

luncheon, to look at Bill's trophies; and then drifted, all smoking, out on the lawn.

"You're certainly a sharpshooter, Bill," Thea de Armond giggled. "I'd hate to have *you* point a gun at me."

"Somebody shut the woman up," Uncle Tad muttered. "She's drunk."

But she went on unchecked.

"But shooting at a target isn't like shooting at a man who can shoot back—is it, Jerry? No hazard." Jerry glared at her contemptuously; Bill never even looked at her; but still she went on. "Or a stunt like William Tell's," she said. "There's a real test of nerve and skill—something with a hazard attached. Could you shoot an apple off your son's head, Bill—or this cigarette out of my mouth? I've heard of people who could."

"So've I," Bill grunted. "Never met them, however." Sweetly smiling, Mrs. de Armond turned to Jerry.

"You could, I'm sure; you're used to shooting with a hazard. Want to see if you could hit my cigarette?"

Jerry fidgeted.

"No hazard in that," he observed imprudently. It might have been meant as a joke, but it didn't sound like one.

"Oh, well!" she said. "If you want a real hazard, try it on Maida."

"Go to hell!" said Jerry, shaking.

Maida flicked the ash off her cigarette; her cool gray eyes stared at Thea with a touch of arrogance.

"He could do it," she said. "Bill too, for that matter."

"Well, of course," Mrs. de Armond conceded blandly, "you know what Jerry can do so much better than the rest of us. But *I* don't believe he could."

"Show her, Jerry," said Maida.

She supposed it was a reflex of her anger—if the woman hadn't been her guest she'd have struck her in the face. Or perhaps it was a test of nerve, her nerve and Jerry's; a public proclamation that they two, together, weren't afraid. Or it might have been only a blend of tortured desperation and the old brandy. . . . At any rate, the cries of protest only fixed her resolution.

"You're crazy!" Jerry snarled. "I won't do it! I——"

"You're going to do it," she cut in inflexibly, just in time to drown his "I can't." Inwardly she was raging. Was it to this that she must trust her life—this easy confidence that collapsed before a test? She'd start training Jerry right now.

For she'd glanced at Bill, standing silent, immobile, to all appearance politely bored; and the contrast was a little too much. Bill had his faults, but she'd lived eight years with a man. She meant to live with another if she changed at all.

"Jerry," she reminded him, "you said this morning that you could do anything. Show them you meant it. . . . Show me."

Her steady gray eyes told him that he had to show her—now or never. With a gesture of helplessness

he turned toward the gun room. . . . Now Bill, she reflected, would have told me to stop talking rot—and made me stop. And of course he knows what it means——

By that time there was a clamor, a dozen voices crying at once. In a blurry way they all felt that it ought to be stopped, but nobody knew how. So, instinctively, they turned to Bill; and their clamor rebounded, futile, from his impassive silence. . . . Maida had taken her stand in front of a three-foot oak. Thea de Armond was pacing off the distance. As Jerry came out of the gun room they swarmed about him—all but Helen Venable. She stayed with Bill.

"You've got to stop it!" she told him. "She's your wife!"

"She's twenty-seven years old. If she wants to try it——"

"Look how he's shaking, Bill! Do you want to kill her?"

"Jerry's a good shot," Bill said.

"When he's sober." Her eyes blazed. "Bill, you've let things go on—I don't know whether you call yourself a gentleman or just don't care. But I did think you had the nerve to do your own murders."

"I have," said Bill. "If it comes to that." He walked over to Jerry, took the automatic out of his hand. "Good gun," he said. "But take the old single-action Colt for this job. It throws truer."

He looked calmly at Helen Venable, undisturbed by the frank loathing in her eyes.

There was a flustered running about, then a sudden

silence. Maida stood motionless, her rose frock bright against the dark oak, a fresh-lighted cigarette immovable between her lips. Jerry's unsteady fingers loaded the Colt; they all saw that he used three cartridges. He passed a hand over his eyes. . . . In the dead stillness Maida's voice rang clear.

"I call you all to witness that I started this. If—if anything happens it's my fault—mine alone."

She replaced the cigarette, a tiny finger of white; Jerry raised the gun. No one breathed; the muzzle made tiny circles in the air. . . . He lowered his hand, wiped his face with a handkerchief.

"Jerry!" Maida was harsh. "Do your stuff!"

Again the gun rose, leveled unsteadily. . . . Bang!

But his hand had jerked high as he squeezed the trigger; the bullet thwutted into the trunk five feet above her head. He flung the gun away, collapsed in a quivering heap.

"I couldn't do it!" he moaned. "I didn't dare!"

Half a dozen women were trying to choke down hysterical sobs; but Mrs. de Armond, cool and smiling, picked up the gun and opened it.

"Two more cartridges, Jerry. One was for me, wasn't it, if you'd hit her? 'To pierce thee, tyrant, had I slain my son.'"

"Yes, damn you! One for you and one for me, if I'd hit her."

"Well, well! Buck up, boy," said Uncle Tad Melburn, unsteadily cheerful. "You didn't hit her——"

He stopped, aware that his remark was dropping into a fathomless silence. Bill Partland had taken

the gun out of Thea's hand; he ejected one of the cartridges, tossed it away. The gun clicked shut.

"My turn now," he said.

"Not you!" Thea de Armond protested. She turned to the others, with a cackling laugh. "But this is murder! He's her husband!"

Perhaps she meant that as a joke; she was capable of it. But it wasn't a joke; they all knew it was the cold truth. Murder. . . . And nobody could stop it.

Jerry Delehunt tried to stop it; he struggled to his feet, stumbled forward—— Without anger, without effort, Bill's open hand thrust against Jerry's jaw, and pushed; Jerry plunged headlong on the lawn, a dozen feet away.

"Bill!" Helen Venable screamed. "Stop it."

"Be still!" said Maida. "He's right. It's his turn now."

Again she stood against the tree trunk, erect, nonchalant, smothering a cough as smoke trickled up into her nostrils. For that tiny white finger was shorter, now, by more than half; the cigarette had burned down almost to her lips. She took it out for an instant.

"I call you all to witness that if anything happens——" she began.

"Shut up," said Bill.

She shrugged, and faced him with a smile.

And now his arm went out, the gun came level. Full of old brandy he might be, but he stood like a statue cast in bronze. Even Thea de Armond held her breath as she looked at Maida's clear arrogant gray eyes, waiting——

Bang! . . . Maida swayed, her hands over her face. Before the others could stir Bill was beside her, his arms around her.

"It's all right." She looked up, with a gasping laugh. "Got a bit of tobacco in my eye, that's all. You certainly pulverized that cigarette, old-timer." She released herself but her hand lingered for an instant, squeezing his. "It's all right, everybody. Let's have a drink. For once we need it."

"But, Bill!" (Thea de Armond, of course.) "*You* didn't have another cartridge ready for yourself, if you'd hit her."

"Don't be an ass," said Maida in disgust. "He knew he wouldn't. So did I. . . . Somebody pick Jerry up and cart him home; he's all in."

Uncle Tad Melburn took him home, and he never came back. . . . So the Partlands are reestablished as Manorwood's model pair, now that Bill is off the brandy.

HANDY MAN

"NEVER marry a handy man about the house," her aunt, who had done it, once advised her. But Marian had forgotten that before she met Paul Sturges. So they were married, and began to live happily ever after.

They started in a Village apartment that was called a studio and looked like a barn. It was cheap because it needed rewiring, repainting, a dozen kinds of repair; but Paul said he could put it in shape, and he did, though it took all his evenings and Sundays for the first two months of their marriage. The things he could do with a hammer and screw driver and a paint brush and a coil of wire were a continual amazement to his wife, whose only mechanical accomplishment was swift and faultless shorthand and typewriting. She used to reflect in those first months that it was rather hard to get acquainted with a husband who was always up on a stepladder; but they would have all the rest of their lives for that.

She had kept her job as a secretary; with two salaries and only one rent they could live better than either of them had lived as a bachelor—dining out almost every evening, and dining well. They went to the theater a good deal, too, after Paul had put the studio in shape and had nothing else to do with his

evenings. Marian wondered sometimes if they shouldn't be saving money; but as he said, it was silly to pinch the pennies when the five thousand dollars he had received from his father's life insurance was safely stowed away in the savings bank. As a bachelor she had had no luxuries but pretty clothes; she didn't realize how easily planked steaks and aisle seats at the theater could become a habit, till she had to give them up after Jane was born—two whole years before they'd intended to have a child.

They'd always meant to have two when they started; but after they had paid the hospital and the obstetrician they decided to defer that second child a while, if they could. For things were different, with one more person in the family, and one less salary.

Marian had meant to go back to her job as soon as the baby could be entrusted to a nursemaid, but after she had taken Jane through the first attack of croup she swore she would never entrust her to the sort of nursemaid they could afford. They had dreamed of a trained nurse; but the promotion at the office that Paul had been counting on for a year had gone to a Mrs. Bassett instead. He was bitter, when he had to bring that news home.

"She's just a machine, that Flora Bassett," he growled. "Works every minute. Her husband ran off and left her with a baby, to sink or swim——"

"So she swims," Marian finished dryly. "And the baby?"

"Parked with a grandmother up state, I believe. Mrs. Bassett lives in a furnished room and spends

about twelve hours a day at the office. Doesn't give herself time to live."

"Maybe she has lived," Marian suggested. "And in a furnished room she can't paint the floor, or fix the electric bell, or tinker with the refrigerator. What can she do, poor thing, but work and get promotions?"

After dinner, when she had cooled off, they had a serious talk about money, or the lack of it. They decided to take another apartment, larger and more comfortable than the studio, and less picturesque and expensive. (The landlord had raised the rent of the studio, arguing with reason that the repairs Paul had made had increased its value.) The new apartment was very new, shiny and modern; Paul used to prowl about it of evenings, scowling and fidgeting as he discovered that not a thing in it needed to be treated with a hammer and pliers.

"Why don't you go to a movie?" Marian used to ask him, when his restless inspections got on her nerves.

"You can't leave the baby, dear. And I won't leave you."

She knew he didn't care for the movies, anyway; his idea of a pleasant evening was repairing a lamp standard, or staining the walls.

She could have left the baby—there were women who could be hired to come in for the evening—but when the dinner dishes had been washed Marian wanted to lie down and rest because she had been out all day, pushing the baby carriage up and down, chasing oblongs and triangles of sunlight around the corners of

city blocks, till she loathed every sidewalk in the neighborhood. When she wasn't pushing the baby carriage she was doing her housework. In her bachelor days she had been a competent unit of business machinery, a person whom other persons liked; but she'd always been a little stiff and shy with men. Till Paul came along, she had seldom thought of herself as a woman. Now, as she wheeled the baby carriage, and warmed milk, and washed baby clothes in endless quantity, she began to feel extremely biological.

Then Paul came home one evening and told her he had taken the five thousand out of the savings bank, for the first payment on a house in that much advertised and highly promising Long Island suburb, Luxuriant Gardens.

"Are you crazy?" she gasped. "All our money? . . . Well, then, all your money, if you want to be proprietary about it."

"Listen, Marian, it's a wonderful bargain. Ten rooms and three baths——"

"How could we ever furnish a house as big as that? And even if we furnished it, what on earth would we ever do with it?"

"We'll grow up to it," he promised with a flash of the optimism he had almost outgrown. "Besides, it's such a bargain——"

That was true, though a realtor had told him so. Not till they were settled in the house, and compassed about by so great a cloud of mortgages, covenants, and restrictions that they doubted if they would ever see daylight again, did they understand why the previous

owner had let them have their bargain. The sort of people who, having moral scruples against poker and horse racing, lose their money in real estate were about that time preparing to lose it in Florida. Customers were few on Long Island, and the promoters of Luxuriant Gardens had discovered that they could not make it the opulently landscaped development that their publicity had promised without spending some of their own money. So parks and driveways remained in the blue-prints; the houses stood forlorn in naked autumnal fields, a mile from the nearest grocery.

The house the Sturgeses had bought was within walking distance of the railroad station, if you liked to walk; but it was in scandalous disrepair. The previous owner had had all he could do to meet the second-mortgage payments, without patching up the plaster and the plumbing.

"Oh, I know everything that's the matter with it," said Paul, when Marian, horrified, gave him a list of the house's faults. "I saw all that before I took it. But there isn't a thing wrong that I can't fix myself, of evenings and Sundays."

Now she knew why he had bought it.

II

Putting the house in shape kept him busy for two years, at the end of which time he pointed out that it was worth fifty per cent. more than they had paid for it.

"Or than anybody else will ever pay for it," Marian

appended ungenerously. "Who'd ever want to live in this abomination of desolation, when there are twenty suburbs half an hour nearer town?"

"Our friends like to come out for Sunday dinner," he insisted. So they did; especially on hot summer Sundays. On winter evenings when Paul was away on business, and Marian wanted somebody to keep her company, their friends couldn't be dragged off Manhattan Island.

"I'd thought of asking Mrs. Bassett out to dinner next Sunday," he said, "if it's all right with you. She practically runs our department now; promotions depend on her. We're pretty good friends around the office, she and I; and if she could see——"

He broke off, flushing. . . . If she could see the wonderful things you've done to the house, Marian supplied mentally, she'd be so much more pleased than with the wonderful things you might do in the office. . . . But she knew enough not to say things like that, now.

So Mrs. Bassett came; and Marian who had heard so much about the shrewd hard business woman was amazed to meet a slight little person who hadn't much to say, but looked and listened with a fierce watchful eagerness. Her manner, beside Paul's easy-going geniality, told well enough why she had got ahead in the office. Mrs. Bassett did her best to make friends with little Jane, but without much success.

"I don't know much about children," she apologized to Marian. "I see my own baby so seldom. Thank God I can bring her up in comfort; she'll have

things I never had. . . . But that's not everything."

It was something, thought Marian, who had never had a garment as good as Mrs. Bassett's fur coat.

"Had you worked before you were married?" she asked. And, when the other woman nodded—"Was it hard to get back into it, afterward?"

"Of course it was hard, but I had to do it. You can do anything when you have to."

"*You* could," said Marian in a flash of envious admiration. At which Mrs. Bassett laughed, not very cheerfully.

Marian was afraid she would never like the woman —there was some chemical antipathy between them; but she respected her immensely. Mrs. Bassett had done what she had to do; and Paul, who had started above her in the organization, was dependent on her now for promotion. Marian, who had once been a competent business woman in her own right, was dependent on her too. That wasn't a pleasant thought; but Marian went on to other thoughts, less pleasant still.

She had married a handy man about the house, and had become a handy woman about the kitchen. Against her expectation, almost against her will, she had turned into an excellent cook, a conscientious housekeeper. She made her husband a comfortable home and he was always in it. She was fond of him, but she thought she would like him better if he returned after six months' absence. She knew he would stoutly maintain that she was the finest woman in the world; but she knew, too, that he would be more attentively in-

terested in her if she were something he could fix with a hammer.

Of course there was Jane—six years old, now, healthy and intelligent; with a fair prospect of being pretty. But Jane was daddy's girl; she despised dolls, and was enchanted by electric trains. . . . And Marian's thick shock of fluffy black hair was beginning to show streaks of gray.

She was a fool, she supposed, to let it get on her nerves; there must be millions of women in exactly her position. Some of them took to drink, some to golf, some to flirtation, and some to Christian fortitude.

Marian got a stack of old note-books out of her trunk, and began to practise her shorthand.

III

That fall an attack of influenza struck her down; for three weeks they had to have the maid they had always thought they couldn't afford. Marian, convalescing, observed with interest that the maid did all the things she had been doing for years, and did them just about as well. . . . . And got more money for it than she had ever been able to save for herself out of her allowance. . . .

She mentioned this to the doctor on his last call, for they were old friends as friendships go in the suburbs; they had danced together at the club, and she had played bridge with his wife.

"I suppose it's silly," she admitted, reclining in con-

valescent luxury on her chaise longue. "But to think there's not one thing you can do better than anybody else——"

He eyed her with a look she had never seen in his face before. . . . For that matter it was years since she had seen it in Paul's face.

"You can look better than any other woman in town!" he burst out. "In that—that thing you're wearing——"

That thing she was wearing was a perfectly decorous negligée; but she knew its deep wine red set off her deep black hair, and the not unbecoming pallor of an invalid. She knew, too, that it was frayed and worn, for it was five years old; and in sheer bewilderment she heard herself saying—

"Oh, but if you'd seen the clothes I had before I was married——"

She checked herself, crimson; that sounded like criticism of Paul.

"I wish I had!" said the doctor. "I wish I had!"

Whereupon he walked out, without even feeling her pulse.

That night she told Paul she wanted to keep the maid.

"I know we can't afford her—now," she admitted, "with mortgage payments and insurance premiums. But if I went back to work——"

"Back to work? Why should you?"

"Why shouldn't I? We're not getting anywhere. . . . Oh, we meet our bills; in another ten years we'll own the house, all but the first mortgage——"

"Yes, and I've made it worth twice what it was!"

"You haven't made yourself worth twice what you were. Why don't you get on at the office? Because you quit at five, or maybe a little earlier, to come home and tinker with the car or build a set of book shelves. And I'll be as bad if I don't get out. Do you know what we are, you and I—what we've made of ourselves? A pair of efficient servants—the sort of married couple people with country houses advertise for. We'll never be out of a job; anybody'd pay us our keep as chauffeur-handyman and cook-housekeeper. . . . But I was a business woman, once. A good one, too."

"But by the time you'd paid the maid out of your salary, and bought your lunches and commutation ticket——"

"I could buy my clothes, anyway. The sort of clothes I want."

"There's nothing the matter with your clothes!" he growled.

"How do you know? You never look at them."

That provoked an explosion; but they ended in a gust of emotional contrition that closed the argument for the moment. They decided to keep the maid, and postpone the discussion till after the holidays; for Christmas had been their high festival ever since Jane was old enough to clap her hands at the tree. This year—it was enough to make anybody believe in Santa Claus—there was a fat Christmas bonus in the office. This year, thought Marian, she'd give him a real present—the big humidor he'd never been able to af-

ford. The money had to come out of the fund she had slowly built up to replenish her underwear supply; but she suspected that Santa Claus would take care of that. The last time she had been in town with Paul she had halted with a gasp of hopeless admiration before a window full of French underwear—scarlet and black and hand-painted. It had been impossible, then; but now that they had the bonus——

They always gave each other their own presents after they had trimmed the tree on Christmas Eve, so as not to interfere with Jane in the morning. She gave him the humidor, and was hugged in gratifying acknowledgment; then he brought out an immense package that might have held a two years' supply of underwear, but didn't.

"But Paul!" she said in a queer thin voice. "A radio-phonograph!"

"Think we couldn't afford it?" he asked, perceiving that something was wrong. "But, Marian, I got a bargain! This was marked down from four hundred to a hundred and twenty-five because there's something wrong with it; but I can fix that in an hour or two——"

"Then you'd better start fixing it now," she told him. "I'm going to bed."

On Christmas night there was a dance at the club. Under the mistletoe in the bright ballroom various people kissed each other, with the self-consciousness of suburban respectability pretending to be dissolute; the doctor kissed Marian. Then, after he had danced with her, he took her out to a dim alcove and kissed

her again. She had meant to stop him, but she didn't. The fourth time she didn't stop him his wife walked in; she was fiercely jealous, and trailed him everywhere. It was quite a scandal for Luxuriant Gardens; but it might have come to nothing, so far as the Sturgeses were concerned, if Paul hadn't dragged her aside and demanded furiously:

"How long has this been going on?"

"For years!" she said. "For years!"

Later it occurred to them both that they might have been talking about different things; but by that time Marian was on her way to Reno.

IV

It took all the money they could scrape together to send her there, and keep her there for the three months' residence required before she could sue him for cruelty; but they had agreed that that was better than a New York divorce. Paul had offered to commit the fictitious infidelity required by the punctilious ethics of the state, but she saw no reason why she should stigmatize him on the court records for something he hadn't done. Still, she had to admit, it was decent of him to make the offer; for she knew he thought she had really been unfaithful. She was too angry to tell him she hadn't. . . . Or, perhaps, too flattered.

Reno, she always said afterward, was wasted on her; she spent all her time getting up her shorthand. When she came back to New York, and called at the office

where she had worked before she was married, she found that after nine years the same office manager was in charge. He remembered her competence, and gave her a job at a gratifying increase in salary.

But times had changed, Marian discovered; taking dictation from a man who stalked up and down the room, mumbling gustily, wasn't the same as solitary practise at home; and her fingers that had once been so nimble with fountain pen and typewriter keys had lost some of their knack in years of sewing on buttons. It was months before she felt that she had mastered her job, and really earned the forty-five dollars a week that bought less than thirty had bought before she was married.

She missed the spaciousness of the house on Long Island—all the more after she had spent a Sunday there with Jane; she missed the warmth of the furnace over which Paul used to putter. The radiator in her furnished room was more like a refrigerator. Still, she was free. . . . The girls she had known in the old days in the office were all married, now; but gradually she made new acquaintances, new friends, among business women of her own age. And they too reminded her that times had changed. There was a strained alertness about them; compared to the housewives she had known, the girls she had worked with before she was married, they were hard. Business women in the twenties, she perceived, were mostly working till the right man came along; business women in the thirties had despaired either of being suited, or of being wanted. They were on their own and there

was not a great deal of it. No wonder they looked strained.

Some of them had men, but not the right men; not right enough to marry, at any rate. None of her friends was promiscuous; but she wondered if their strict extra-marital fidelity sprang from principle, or from a realization that men of any kind were scarce. Marian hadn't thought about men, while she was getting her divorce; she'd never been really in love with anybody but Paul, and she hated him, now. As for the doctor, she had heard that he and his wife had been reconciled. She supposed he would look her up, of course, as a matter of courtesy; she was prepared to tell him, with cool unsentimental friendliness, that it was absurd to have ever supposed that there could be anything serious between them. But he never came around. He liked to graze in forbidden pastures but he never got beyond the length of his tether. His practise was in Luxuriant Gardens, and his wife had money.

So, as the summer wore on, Marian became conscious of the Man Problem. She had assumed that men would be hanging around, as they had hung around before she was married—men who found her stiff shyness discouraging to any serious intentions, but were perfectly willing to spend their money on her, at dinner and the theater. But things that happened to you at twenty-five didn't seem to happen when you were thirty-four, even if you still looked young except for the streaks of gray in your hair; even if marriage had cured you of that stiff shy-

ness. Gradually she realized that women of her type —young enough, attractive enough, self-supporting— were a drug on the market. Men of their own age who could be taken seriously had been preempted long ago; you had your choice between gun-shy bachelors who would take anything they could get for nothing, married men at liberty while their wives and children were away for the summer, and misfits whom no woman would want.

So the women she knew fell into two classes—those who let men severely alone and those who were willing to take any man on any terms. As between the alternatives Marian decided to let men severely alone. But that wasn't altogether satisfactory either. She was still furious with Paul, and more furious with herself because sometimes she missed him merely from habit. It wasn't that she missed a man in general, of course; she had never thought of herself as a particularly sensuous woman. Still it was rather disquieting that men let her severely alone, except for one or two poor creatures she'd have been ashamed to be seen with. She began to wonder if she ought to dye her hair.

One day Mrs. Bassett met her on the street, and stopped her.

"So you've divorced Paul," she said. "It's none of my business, but I think you're a damn fool. I just wanted to get that on the record."

"Thanks!" said Marian, white and tense. "But it really isn't your business, is it?"

"Only this far—I had to do most of his work for him, at first. He was mooning around like a lost soul;

you'd only have had to whistle to bring him back. Now——"

"Yes?" said Marian breathlessly. "Now——?"

"Now he's working twelve hours a day—the way I worked when I was fighting for my promotion. If he'd worked that way then he'd have got it, not I. But he never started till he had to pay alimony."

"I haven't taken a cent of his money! I earn my own!"

"And what a lot of fun that is," said Mrs. Bassett. "Then he must be working because he can't stand it to go home. . . . What became of your child?"

"He kept her; she was—closer to him than she was to me," Marian confessed, flushing. "And he's got an excellent governess. I see her every Sunday, of course."

"And him?" asked Mrs. Bassett, with a familiar strained alertness.

"He plays golf on Sundays. . . . Not that it concerns you, does it?"

"Not a bit. But if I'd had what you had—— And you used to envy me, didn't you? Oh, I could see it. . . . It's a cutthroat game, my dear. We all want everything, and there isn't enough of it to go around."

"Really," said Marian stiffly, "I don't see how this concerns——"

"There's to be a new vice-presidency in our organization before long," Mrs. Bassett interrupted. "I'd give my eyes for it, but they won't give it to a woman. At the rate Paul's going he'll get it. . . . You can't tell

me money makes no difference. So if that will make difference enough——"

"No!" Marian blazed. "After the things we've said to each other, nothing will ever make difference enough!"

She hated to think about it or talk about it, but worst of all she hated the suspicion that Paul had sent Mrs. Bassett to do his talking for him. . . . Or perhaps—— Marian gasped. Perhaps she had been talking for herself. It was a cutthroat game, but some women played it fairly.

V

At first, when she made her Sunday visits to Jane, Paul was at home, and they made a ghastly pretense of friendliness. That had been dropped; now she had Jane to herself, and the child who saw her mother rarely loved her as she had never seemed to when mother was around the house all day. She seemed healthy enough; but whenever Marian left her she burst into hysterical weeping. So in October Marian wrote to Paul that she wanted to talk to him. He took her to lunch in town, at a better restaurant than they had ever visited when they were married—even when they had two salaries and no child; it startled her, not unpleasantly, to realize that she wasn't his wife, she was a woman he was taking out to lunch. But they ate in silence, their stiff formality covering a hair-trigger tension; silly, she mused, that a man

and a woman who had lived together and produced a child couldn't be friends. Then, when their cigarettes were lighted—

"Paul," she said, "you've got to fire that governess. I know she's perfect; she does things for Jane that I never did and never could do. But she's a machine."

"I live in that house too," he growled. "A machine was what I wanted."

"Somebody who wouldn't talk back?" (She wondered what made her jab him like that.) "But a machine won't do. Miss Todd's one of these modern, scientific, unemotional persons. Maybe that's fine for some children, but Jane needs to be loved. I know you love her, but she needs somebody to love her when you're at the office. Maybe we spoiled her when she was a baby; maybe children shouldn't want to be loved. But Jane does need it, now; and we—I mean you've got to do the best for her you can."

"I'll have more time for her after Christmas," he said. "There's to be a change at the office; I hope to have more free time. More money, too."

"She needs more than you can give her, Paul."

"Well, you're a fine one to say that! If you hadn't——"

"If you hadn't——!" she countered furiously.

He half started up; for an instant she thought he was going to strike her—or seize her hands. She waited, weak, breathless—— He pushed back his chair and got up, with a sour grin.

"What a pair of fools we are, Marian! Let's try to be decent to each other, anyway. No reason why

we shouldn't be friendly." . . . Exactly what she had been thinking; she didn't know why it infuriated her to find that he thought so too. . . . He eyed her sharply. "That suit's positively threadbare," he rasped. "There's no sense in your not letting me——"

"Not a nickel!" she told him, shaking with rage. At least she supposed it must be rage, though it didn't feel much like it afterward.

That week she took all the money she had and bought a smart new suit. She wore it out to Luxuriant Gardens the next Sunday, but Paul had gone to play golf, so the gesture missed fire. Jane perplexed her with talk of Aunt Flora, and Elinor.

"Elinor's Aunt Flora's little girl," the child explained eventually. "They were out here yesterday, to spend the day."

"But who's Aunt Flora? I thought I knew all your father's people."

"Why, that's Mrs. Bassett. She asked me to call her Aunt Flora, and daddy said it would be all right."

"Oh!" said the woman who still called herself Mrs. Sturges.

So when he called her up a few days later and asked her to lunch with him she refused. She didn't want to go through that again.

"But I want to talk to you," he insisted. She was just about to say "Yes" when he added: "About Jane. . . . No, she isn't sick. But if I let the governess go, I'd hardly know what to do——"

"You'd better ask Aunt Flora," said Marian miserably.

VI

They arranged by an exchange of diplomatic notes, stiffly polite, that Jane was to have her Christmas in two instalments. On Christmas Eve her mother was to come out for dinner while Paul went to the club. The next day he and Jane were going to have guests; he didn't say who they were, but Marian could guess. She would spend Christmas Day—and Christmas night, that melancholy anniversary—in her furnished room. . . . But, of course, she was free.

It seemed unnatural not to be planning a Christmas present for Paul; but after she saw that Electric Village in the toy-store window she was thankful that all her Christmas money could be spent on Jane. There were a dozen houses in it—dwellings, stores, a garage; a score of tiny figures that set busily to work when you plugged into a baseboard socket and turned a switch. Just the thing to please her mechanically minded daughter—and it was unique; the store had imported, it seemed, only this one specimen. When Marian heard that, she knew she had to have it at any price.

She got it, demounted and neatly boxed. She hadn't foreseen it was going to be so cumbersome and heavy; she hadn't foreseen, for that matter, that she was going to have to walk to the house through snowdrifts on Christmas Eve. Paul had taken his car to the club; he had supposed she would take a taxi up from the station. But on Christmas Eve the few taxis that served Luxuriant Gardens were all in use.

For the town was growing; Marian saw that as she plodded through the drifts that overtopped her galoshes. Florida, overinflated, had burst with a bang; but Coolidge prosperity still beamed on the nation, and there were still people with moral scruples against poker and horse racing who chose to lose their money in real estate. Long Island was coming back into its own. Where naked fields had stretched a year ago trim Dutch Colonial cottages stood now; each one with its holly wreath in the window, its lighted tree on display in the glass-walled porch, its dimly heard radio resonant with chimes and carols. A cheerful scene, if you happened to be sentimental, and didn't stop to reflect that every one of those households was overshadowed by black worry about the mortgage; or if your legs weren't wet to the knee, and your arms aching with the burden of a boxed Electric Village.

But Marian was very happy with Jane in the warm spacious house. She dried her stockings before a cheerful log fire, and ate such a dinner as the restaurants she could afford never provided, even on Christmas Day. Afterward there was the tree, that Paul had trimmed and lighted before he went off to the club. He had left no present for Marian, but when she opened the big box that Jane gave her she knew he had collaborated; for here was a whole year's supply of the French underwear she loved. If only he'd done that a year ago——! . . . Marian shook off the afterthoughts, and began to unwrap her gift for Jane.

"O-o-oh!" the child screamed. "The Electric Village! I saw it in the window, one day when I was

in town with Miss Todd. I told daddy, and next day he went to look for it, and it was gone. And you got it!"

"Yes, darling, I got it for you. Now as soon as we get it set up——"

Marian's voice faded out; she'd had no idea there were so many pieces when the thing was taken apart. And wires, and switches, and connections; and appliances whose use she couldn't even guess.

"I'll have to read the directions first," she apologized.

But the directions were a book; it looked as long and intricate to Marian as a textbook on engineering. Before she had even finished reading it, Miss Todd the governess came in with the news that Jane must go to bed.

Jane protested, and wept. Marian protested, and then argued, and then threw away her pride and entreated; and after that she lost her temper and almost screamed. But to reasoning, entreaties, ravings the faultless Miss Todd, modern and unemotional, opposed a simple toneless: "I'm sorry, Mrs. Sturges. Mr. Sturges's orders." So Marian, who could give no orders in that house, had to see her child dragged off to bed, hysterically shrieking. On Christmas Eve.

"Never mind, darling!" she called up the stairs. "Mother will set up your village. It will be all ready when you come down to breakfast."

What optimism that was, she mused an hour later, sitting on the floor in the midst of a chaos of toy men and toy houses, and wires, and lights, and jiggets, and

doodads. It was easy to get half of the thing together —any half; but after that the rest would fit in nowhere. And she had to get it set up; Paul might come home from the club at any moment. . . .

Another hour; Paul hadn't come but the work was still unfinished; and the last train back to town left at eleven-twenty-four. Marian brooded a while, and at last got up and telephoned to the club.

"Paul!" she said. "Come over to the house; I need you."

"Need me? What——?"

"It's for Jane——" she began, and heard him slam the receiver on the hook.

Two minutes later his car rolled up; she heard him jump out, slam the door, come tearing in—— Why, of course; he must have thought Jane was ill. . . . He was in the doorway, panting; he gasped, and then chuckled, as he looked down at Marian, sitting helpless on the floor in the midst of a heap of inadjustable parts.

"Oh!" he said. "So it was you who bought that."

"I knew you'd buy it if you saw it," she confessed. "And I wanted to do one last thing for Jane that you couldn't do, or that woman either. . . . And now I can't get the damn thing put together."

She wanted to kick the furniture, break the windows; she wanted to cry. She'd bungled her gesture, as she bungled everything. . . . But she wouldn't cry before Paul.

"I hate to ask you to help me," she said savagely, "just as much as you hate to do it. But I promised

Jane that the thing would be in running order when she came down to breakfast. If it isn't——"

"Her day would be ruined," he agreed. "Well, now —let's see."

He squatted on the floor and began to cast his eye over the pieces of the Electric Village.

She got up presently; there was nothing she could do, now, and besides it made her nervous to have his hands moving about so close to hers. So she stretched out on the chaise longue, and lighted a cigarette, watching his skilful fingers reducing the chaos to order. In ten minutes the village was assembled; but when he plugged in the switch nothing happened.

"Must be some connection I overlooked," he grunted. "And there's nothing to do but go over it, piece by piece. . . . I'm out of practise; it's a long time since I've tinkered with a job like this."

"What do you do with your spare time?" She'd meant that to jab him, but it sounded good-humored—just a family joke. He grinned up at her—the first time either of them had grinned at the other in a year.

"Believe it or not, Marian, I'm a handy man around the office now. Our organization's a worn-out machine; Flora Bassett's a great saleswoman but no executive. There's a lot of tinkering that needs to be done and I'm the tinker, even if they do call me a vice-president. Keeps me busy. . . . Now let's see if that switch will work."

It didn't, but he kept on patiently. Marian, watching him, found that the stiffness and tension had evaporated. She supposed she could safely have lunched

with him after all, that time he asked her. It had been a long time since any other man at all had asked her to lunch; and there was no doubt that Paul who had chosen her, whom she had chosen, when she was twenty-five, was a good deal more presentable than any man who looked twice at her now that she was thirty-four. She felt as much at ease with him as if they were married; it was such an agreeable sensation that she never thought of the time till she heard the distant rumble of a departing train, and cast a panicky glance at the clock on the mantel.

"Paul!" she gasped. "I've missed the last train!"

"Too bad," he muttered absently, and twisted something in the mechanism of the Electric Village. Lights blazed in every house, a score of tiny figures set busily to work. He rose, contemplated his work with satisfaction. Then he sat down on the chaise longue at Marian's feet. She sat up, her face white; she didn't feel at ease with him now.

"Paul Sturges, you could have fixed that thing half an hour ago!"

"I could. But I wanted to talk to you."

"You picked a fine time for it. And a fine place!"

"What else could I do? I've tried to see you, but you hold me off." He paused, suspicion rising in his face. "Marian! Are you seeing the doctor?"

"Oh, good heavens, no! I haven't seen him since a year ago to-morrow night. . . . He wasn't anybody, Paul. Just the—the man who happened to be there, when I was furious at you."

"You mean there wasn't anything—— What an

ass I've been! Every time I've seen him for a whole year I've been wondering—— Well! Thank God I made a chance to talk to you to-night."

"But this isn't fair! I can't spend the night in this house."

"It's a big house," he reminded her. "With Miss Todd and the maid as chaperons. . . . If that's what you mean."

"You know perfectly well," said Marian shakily, "that that isn't what I mean. And I think it's rotten of you to torment me like this——"

They looked at each other; and they both felt as if, in a dark room, the lights of a Christmas tree had been turned on. When he reached out for her, she met him half-way. . . . But presently she drew back and looked him in the eye.

"All right!" she said. "But I'm going back to town after breakfast. And if you still want to marry Flora Bassett to-morrow, go ahead. It's a cutthroat game; but she plays fair and so will I."

"Flora Bassett? What makes you think I want to marry her?"

"Well, if she and her child are coming here for Christmas dinner——"

"They're not. Cousin Bert Foster and his family are coming over from Sea Cliff. Flora—— Well, I like her a lot; but—— I was going to ask you to marry me, Marian." His arms tightened about her. "But I guess this settles everything, doesn't it?"

"For to-night," she said. "But to-morrow, if you want to marry Flora Bassett—— And if you don't,

I'd like to know why you told Jane to call her Aunt Flora!" He released her, looked away.

"Well, yes," he said. "I never exactly asked her to marry me; but I thought you were through with me, and—— Well, we both knew it was coming. . . . Only, Jane didn't like her."

"Oh, Paul! . . . Of course," she said, "you couldn't marry anybody who couldn't get along with Jane. But it seems a pity, if you wanted her. . . . What did she say about it?"

"Well, she saw how it was. Sensible woman, Flora —quite sportsmanlike. I suppose," he muttered, "it looks as if you were second choice. But——"

"Don't try explaining," she said. "Things like that are all so mixed up. . . . But do you think we dare get married again, Paul?"

"Well, if you feel the way I do—and you can't tell me you don't——"

"Oh, I do, I do! But that doesn't settle anything."

"Do you know anybody who's settled everything?" he demanded.

"No-o," she said uncertainly. "But——"

"The worst things have settled themselves," he told her. "We'll have money, now; and I'm cured of some of my bad habits; and——" He dared to grin. "And maybe you're not quite so hot for freedom as you used to be. And if we feel this way——"

She knew how she felt about him, now; and she rather doubted if that emotion would ever focus itself on any other man. She had the habit of monogamy, and she'd learned that men who met her rather exact-

ing standards were mostly preempted. Yes, so far as her feelings went, she thought it was safe. . . . And she knew how he felt about her, now. But next month, next year——

That's up to me, she perceived. To keep him feeling this way is part of the job, if I decide to take it. . . . He leaned toward her, took her in his arms.

"So long as we love each other——" he said. "That's all that counts!"

She wondered if that was what to call it, but this was not the moment to quibble over definitions.

"Paul," she said, "I'm not going back to town after breakfast! After breakfast I'm going to fire Miss Todd, even if it is Christmas morning."

But she didn't have to commit that offense against the spirit of the season. Miss Todd resigned when she saw Marian coming down to breakfast in a scarlet chiffon negligée—resigned with some emphasis, asserting that a house like this was no place for her.

Mr. and Mrs. Sturges, arm in arm, amiably agreed that it wasn't.

BRIDE OF QUIETNESS

SAY what you will against Irita Bradley—and much has been said, here and there, at one time or another, by this person or that—I hold her in grateful memory. Whatever harm she may have done me, in one black moment she saved my faith.

I had come back after fifteen years to commencement and class reunion at the little coeducational college where she and I had been classmates before the war; to foregather with the old friends I hadn't seen since I went East after graduation. The alumni procession was falling into line; I started to fall in line with it—and then drew back. Beneath the banner that bore our class numerals stood a group of flabby, graying, middle-aged citizens—men with paunches and bald spots, women with sagging faces and figures that had already sagged beyond recovery; people I didn't know.

Once I had known them—or known bright boys and girls who bore their names. That I was fifteen years older than I had been fifteen years ago was no longer news, but it had never occurred to me that all the others would be fifteen years older too. I remembered them as I had known them, the gay companions of those years when we stood eager on the threshold, when I had been happier than I was ever to be again, when for once in a lifetime the gap between aspiration

and achievement was not ruinously wide. They had lived on in memory, in the timeless beauty of figures on a Grecian urn.

Now they were dead, that whole gallant company—massacred en masse, in an instant, by the machine-gun of reality. By brooks too broad for leaping the light-foot boys were laid, the rose-lipped girls were sleeping in fields where roses fade. No doubt the John Kimball they had known was dead, too, and no doubt men and women who had known me and liked me fifteen years ago were grieved by that. But their grief left me unmoved; I felt no fellowship with these aging strangers. I turned aside from the procession that was starting across the campus; I had to get away, alone, to reconstruct my universe. And as I turned, a woman's voice laughed at me.

"Hello, John. . . . Why, I do believe you don't know me!"

I had known her double, fifteen years ago; though the girl I knew coiled her masses of chestnut hair around a wire rat, wore ankle-length skirts that left her legs to inference, and in general tried to look like a young lady (successfully, till you saw her eyes). This girl who would never pretend to be a young lady, whose cropped curls fluffed in the June breeze, whose golden chiffon stockings would have stopped a parade of the G. A. R. in my college days—she had the same eyes; green-gold, lazily mocking.

"But you can't be Irita Sanford's daughter!" I gasped. "She isn't old enough."

"Thank you! Besides, I haven't any daughter."

She had fallen out of the procession, too, that was marching across the campus; and as I looked at the green-gold eyes I felt that she and I had fallen out of the universal procession that marches inexorably on to the common goal, that we stood alone in a magic country where Time was not.

"Come, John, don't look like that. Don't you remember the night you kissed me, right over there by the sun dial?"

"Irita Sanford!" I murmured. "No, Irita—— What *is* your name?"

"Irita Bradley. I've been married twelve years. . . . I'd wondered if you'd come back for the reunion."

But at the moment I could think of nothing but the Miracle.

"Irita, how do you do it?"

"How do the others do it? Poor things, aren't they dreadful? . . . You see, I hadn't seen them for fifteen years either. . . . But we must get back into line, John. My husband's around somewhere, but I'd rather talk to you."

Again we two strolled across the campus, as we had strolled fifteen years ago; and so far as I was concerned the people around us weren't there. For here was Irita, the Irita I remembered; the only person in that numerous gathering who was of an age with the absurd personality inside me that had insisted on remaining young and wide-eyed, obstinately refusing to grow old along with its fleshly cortex. Flabby men and fading women were all around us,

but she and I walked alone in the Lost Paradise. The rest of the Grecian urn had been shattered beyond recovery, but I didn't care; for Irita lived on, a still unravished bride of quietness.

"And you've never married?" she asked me when the ceremonies were over and the crowd was dissolving. I tried to be playful.

"How could I? Any man who remembers you——"

"I have a memory too, my friend. That night you kissed me over there on the chapel steps, when we'd just graduated, I told you that if you'd stay in the Middle West six months longer I might get around to falling in love with you. But you wouldn't wait. You had to go off to Washington and get into the diplomatic service. I thought you'd be an ambassador by now." She saw something in my face. "But maybe you are," she added hastily. "I never read the papers."

"Why, haven't you heard?" I asked her. "I'm coming back here—to the college." She was amazed.

"What for? To coach the football team?"

"Nothing so dignified. I'm to be dean, and professor of modern history. I've been out of the diplomatic service for years, and teaching at Harvard."

"Harvard? Well! I love this old college," she said. "It threw a good education at me, and it's nobody's fault but mine if it didn't stick. But to come back here from Harvard——"

"I'm to be dean," I told her. "Second in command to old Doctor Akeley. He's been president for thirty years and some of these days he'll be gathered to his reward. Assuming that I do the deaning to the gen-

eral satisfaction, I'll be the next president. I find that as one approaches forty one yearns to be president of something—it doesn't much matter what. And I was born a thousand miles too far west to be president of Harvard."

"Won't that be a scream—you in Doctor Akeley's place? I've seen some queer college presidents, but—— Then we'll see lots of each other. We're going to be here too."

"We?" I asked.

"Sam—my husband—and Junior and I. Sam's just been appointed professor of the history of art." I stopped and stared at her.

"Bradley? Your husband isn't S. E. Bradley?"

"Why, yes. Do you know him?"

"No, but everybody knows about him."

She shrugged, politely skeptical. Of course S. E. Bradley's book, *The Law of Symmetry in Line and Curve,* was not what you'd call light reading. But the few superior persons who understood it (which doesn't include me) said it was the biggest thing of its kind since Lessing's *Laokoön.* It had already revolutionized the approach to the philosophy of art, and even the mathematical metaphysicians were beginning to be upset by it.

"But why is he coming here?" I asked. "I love the old college too, but I'd never have dreamed we could get a man like S. E. Bradley. Every university in the country must want him——"

"We've been at most of them already," she said. "We move around."

That worried me. If a man as great as S. E. Bradley moved around he must be a trouble maker, and I was coming back to take care of the trouble. I wished I could meet the man, look him over; but he was nowhere in sight and I had to catch a five o'clock train.

"So you've a son too?" I asked her absently.

"Ten years old. . . . Why not? I wish I could afford six—or even two."

"It seems absurd," I explained lamely, "when you're so utterly unchanged. . . . Irita, how do you do it?"

"I don't do anything special. . . . Perhaps that's it. I don't worry. Let other people do the worrying."

That ought to have warned me; for a lot of worrying has to be done by somebody, things being as they are.

II

I came back in September, and settled my books and furniture in the one apartment house of our little college town. The food problem troubled me, for there's no such thing as domestic service in these parts; but it troubled me no more when I had found the Campus Tea Room, breakfast a specialty. For the Campus Tea Room was owned and operated by Mabel Martin, another of my old classmates; and I remembered her cakes and waffles over fifteen years.

But I hardly recognized Mabel when I came in for breakfast the first morning, and she slipped down from the cashier's desk to shake hands with me. Her figure had been fairly lush and opulent in the old days, but she had put on at least forty pounds since then.

"I know I look like an English barmaid," she said. "And why not if I want to, I want to know?"

"But how do you happen to be running a restaurant?" I asked, for I remembered that she had had some money.

"Doing my stuff—the one thing I can do well. I could have lived on my income, and dieted, and kept around a hundred and twenty-five, and gone on being a college widow. But I'd rather eat my own cooking, let Nature take its course, and be an old maid. When men began to prefer thin women I made my great refusal. Not that I could ever have had a figure like Irita's even if I'd tried."

"Oh, you've seen her, then?" I asked. "Isn't she glorious?"

"You may call it glorious," Mabel sniffed. "I call it indecent; but then maybe I'm only an old sentimentalist."

"What's indecent about it?" I asked hotly.

"When you're thirty-six it's silly to look eighteen. You ought to be your age. She looks like a vampire that keeps young by sucking blood. . . . And have you seen her husband?"

"No, but I want to see him——"

"Don't worry," said Mabel. "You will."

I saw him next morning, when I came into the Campus Tea Room for breakfast; but I didn't know him. Indeed at first I didn't look at him; all my attention was absorbed by the boy who was with him. Siegfried or Achilles might have looked like that, at the age of ten.

"Who's that?" I asked, as I paused at Mabel's desk to say good morning.

"Irita's boy. You might have known it."

"But—— The other?" I asked, staring. She nodded. . . . Yes, it was true; the undersized, bespectacled, baldish man with this golden lad was S. E. Bradley, the world's greatest authority on the laws of beauty.

"What are they doing here?" I asked. "Is Irita sick?"

"No!" Mabel's scornful grunt seemed to echo down along the corridors of Time on its way to the Recording Angel. "These two eat breakfast here every morning. Irita never gets up till half past ten."

Half past ten. . . . In our rural college, classes began at eight; in our town, everybody got up at half past six. Fresh from Boston, I knew I'd find it hard to keep these hours; but even at Harvard, you rarely find a professor's wife asleep at half past ten.

"So that's how she does it!" I exclaimed. "Why not, after all?"

"Why not? There's a certain amount of work, John, that has to get done in this world. If Irita doesn't do her share, somebody else must. You see who does it. I told you she reminded me of a blood-sucking vampire. You see where the blood comes from."

"He does look rather drained," I conceded. "Still, getting up to get breakfast isn't all of life."

"It's part of it," said Mabel grimly. "I don't like to get up early myself, but I do. Customers want

breakfast and I must keep faith with my public. A married woman's public is her husband. I can't imagine anything worse than a wife that won't get up, unless it's a wife that won't—— But I expect that's one thing that can't be said against Irita. . . . But they're saying plenty. The whole town is taking sides already."

"Naturally," I observed. "All the women would hate a woman who looks fifteen years younger than her age."

"You may know a lot, John," she observed compassionately, "though if you do you've learned it since I used to know you. But you don't know it all. Mark my words, there'll be trouble in this town before the winter is over."

Trouble. . . . Irita had admitted that they moved around. This homely retiring pattern of a dutiful husband and father—he couldn't be a trouble maker; and of course it wasn't Irita. It must be the other women who made the trouble, women who hated her because she slept in the morning and stayed young.

"I'd hardly expected to run into trouble so soon," I muttered.

"Don't worry—you and I can watch it from the side-lines. We're only a couple of old maids."

"The dean can't watch from the side-lines if there's trouble in the college," I said. "Or in the faculty families."

The Bradleys had finished their breakfast; the boy picked up his cap and went out, the man came over to pay the check.

"Dean Kimball?" he asked. "Irita spoke of meeting you in June. You must come and see us. But I wanted to ask you—— I find the catalogue sets me down not only as a professor, but as Curator of the Museum. And I can't find the Museum."

"It's in the attic of Philosophy Hall," I told him. "Curating it needn't worry you; there's nothing but a photograph of the Parthenon and a cast of the Discobolus."

"Something in that," he observed. "One or two things, but the best. I'll call at your office later, if you'll be in."

He drifted out, lighting his pipe, and across the street to the campus.

"Only eight o'clock," Mabel sniffed. "He and his boy don't dare go home for two hours and a half; they might wake her up. They've even got the iceman trained to tiptoe up the back steps, for an extra dollar a month. . . . Hello! What's this?"

Rod Mulford who owned the College Drug Store had come in and was ordering breakfast. Now Rod Mulford had a wife; she ruled him with an iron hand, but she took good care of him, as any good manager would take care of the productive assets of the corporation. If Rod had to go out for breakfast something was wrong with his wife; and Mabel and I, who had known them both in college, descended on him, solicitous.

"Sallie isn't sick?" we asked. He looked up with a murky frown.

"Sick? No, she isn't sick. She's asleep. She says

she's going to sleep every morning till half past ten." Choking with rage, he looked out across the campus, where the world-famous S. E. Bradley was prowling aimlessly.

"It's all his fault," Rod snarled. "Damn him! The dirty scab!"

III

So the trouble began; and once begun it grew, inflating and expanding till it overshadowed us all. For in our town where everybody was comfortable but nobody was rich, where even the most prosperous could get no domestic service because the hired girl was a species as extinct as the mastodon—in our town the duty of man, and of woman, was well defined and understood.

The husband made the living and the wife kept house. Usually she had time enough left over after keeping house to go to church, to the movies, to dances, to football games; even, in the faculty households at least, to read books. Usually she did but if she didn't that was her bad luck; just as it was her husband's bad luck if he couldn't make both ends meet. In neither case did bad luck justify lying down on the job. We had our percentage of failures but we had no drones.

Sallie Mulford must have felt that, for after a few days Rod breakfasted at home. He may have got his own breakfast; but he got it in his own kitchen where his shame and his wife's were decently concealed. In

our town bed and board went together; sending your husband out to breakfast was equivalent to an announcement of separation. Sallie Mulford had had to bow to the opinion of the community.

But Irita bowed to no opinion; she let people think what they liked about her sleeping late, her sketchy and half-hearted housekeeping. Whatever they thought she went serenely on, being Irita, our sole representative of the Privileged Classes, the only one among us who professed to be worth what she cost, not for what she did but for what she was. She was a living denial of everything we believed and exemplified, as incarnate a blasphemy against our local creed as a Communist in the Rotary Club or an atheist in church. Of course that made trouble. It was indefinable at first—a mere sense of tension, of something wrong everywhere that nobody dared discuss; at least with a bachelor like myself who was outside the theater of the civil war that was being fought out in every married household. But gradually I saw what was going on; and I was amazed.

I had supposed that women who showed their age would hate a woman who didn't show her age, that good housekeepers would despise a careless housekeeper, that dutiful wives would have nothing but scorn for a wife who loaded half her work on her husband. Not at all. Slowly the horrid truth became all too plain—few of the hard-working women of our town really liked to work. They had grown into the habit because all the women they knew did it, and had always done it. But when Irita appeared, ostenta-

tiously rejecting the first of the day's duties, the duty of leaving a warm bed to get her husband's breakfast, the other women regarded her with frightened admiration. She was the Woman Who Dared; the Liberator who had broken her shackles and shown them all the way.

No, they didn't follow her example. Every woman in town would have liked to, but each one was afraid of what the others would say. But from the occasional frightened abrupt confidences of married men, I gathered that life in our town would have been easier that winter if the women had actually slept till half past ten, instead of only wishing they dared.

I had supposed, moreover, that the women would not only despise Irita but pity Sam. They didn't; they ignored Sam. He was only the person who had to be put in his place as an example to husbands. But the married men didn't ignore him. Not a husband in our town but damned Sam Bradley as a Judas, who had betrayed the working class. They hated Sam; but they didn't hate Irita. They merely wished that their own wives, glowering across the breakfast table at half past six, looked a little more like her.

So life was not easy that winter. There were so many delicate topics that had to be avoided that people got out of the habit of talking at all. It was easier to avoid dangerous ground if you didn't see the Bradleys; so they were invited out very little, in our small-town society where everybody else was invited out all the time. Most of the women and many of the men would have liked to see Irita; but in our town wives

and husbands didn't go out separately, and nobody wanted to see Sam.

It was a winter of discontent, an era of bad feeling—how bad I knew, for I was trying to be neutral. As dean I had to be neutral, to try to keep our faculty and our faculty wives harmonious; but beyond that I liked Sam Bradley—and I liked his wife. Entirely too much.

It must have started that commencement day, when I first saw her. But I didn't begin to see what was the matter till December, when old Doctor Akeley held his annual reception for the faculty, in the President's Mansion. It was a big old-fashioned brick house which had been the President's Mansion even in my student days—a solemn house and a solemn party. There was half-hearted dancing, a thin and abstinent punch, a good deal of perfunctory small talk aimed at keeping the general dissatisfaction from old Doctor Akeley, who was too deaf to hear anything unless you shouted it in his ear. The men barely spoke to Sam, but all of them wanted to dance with Irita; a few women were patronizingly amiable to Sam, but all of them were eagerly cordial to his wife. I counted it quite a triumph when I carried her off after a dance to the porch—glassed and heated, strewn with rugs, half lighted by a couple of heavily shaded lamps. We sat down on a divan in a remote corner and stared down the long empty vista.

"Goodness, what a big house!" she said. "And to think that some of these days you'll be living here. You'll have to marry, then; it would be absurd to

live alone in the President's Mansion with only a couple of servants, even if they do cost as much as associate professors."

"I may not do it," I told her moodily. "They want me to come back to Harvard; and my—my return to the past hasn't worked out as well as I expected."

"Nor mine," she sighed. I was uneasy; Sam and Irita never talked about the troubles they had stirred up, but they must know about it. . . . But she didn't bring it up, now. "You'll look so funny in the President's Mansion!" she laughed. "Do you remember the student reception in our senior year, when you kissed me right here on this very porch?"

I began to feel warm and prickly.

"You'd have trouble finding a spot in the local landscape where I haven't kissed you," I reminded her. "I was crazy about you, Irita."

"I thought you'd have forgotten," she said. "There must have been so many, since."

"One or two. But—— I hate falling in love!"

"Why?" The green-gold eyes were unfathomable.

"For the same reason that I hated getting drunk, on the one or two occasions when I tried it. Because I hate to lose control of myself."

"Yes, I can see that. . . . Still, there's always the question, what do you do with yourself when you have control of it?"

I couldn't pretend that I'd done very much.

IV

I liked Sam Bradley, though he never said much to me, or to anybody but his son. Sam was raising that boy by hand and doing it well; Junior was three years ahead of his age even in our excellent public schools, yet he'd managed to remain perfectly balanced. He looked like a coming superman. Not that even a superman—as Mabel Martin used to remind me—would really enjoy going out for breakfast.

Mabel despised both the Bradleys, Irita for sleeping late and Sam for letting her. Since I liked them both, she and I had little to say to each other that winter; few people in our town had much to say to each other, for that matter—especially husbands and wives. Our community was silently reconsidering woman's place in the family and society, and its reflections were all the more acrid because nobody dared speak out. So more and more I took to spending a bachelor's unoccupied evenings in the only household of the town where there was no silent bitterness, because the question of woman's place had been settled long ago.

The Bradleys were glad to see me; they didn't see many people. Our town hadn't definitely made up its mind about them, but one thing was clear—they were different; as different from the type and as defiant of the general standard as if they had been living in what the newspapers, perhaps too optimistically, call unwedded bliss. So they had plenty of time for me.

Two or three times a week I came to supper (Irita cooked it—very well, too—and we all did the dishes); then we played a rubber of auction before Junior went to bed, and three-handed afterward. They seemed to be a happy family, which was a rare sight in our town just then; and they took me in as one of the family, which began to make me unhappy.

For always before me was this flawless springtime beauty of Irita's, the one familiar thing I had found in the Lost Paradise. I had come back to the old college because I had been happy there once, and felt unconsciously that I'd be just as happy again. But I had changed; everything and everybody had changed except Irita.

At first I told myself that it was only a sentimental echo; then that a professor who fell in love with a married woman was a fool; then that it would be a rotten trick to fall in love with my friend's wife. And then, raging with disgust, I realized that I'd lost control of myself once more. I pretended pressure of work and stayed away from them for a fortnight; but now and then I saw her on the street, and each time the impact of her changeless youth brought back my whole complex— the memories of the Golden Age when I had been adjusted, and happy, and young. If she hadn't looked as I remembered her, it would never have happened; but she did. . . .

That couldn't last. Three or four times she and Sam asked me over to supper, and I refused; then they quit asking me, and began to treat me with the casual

reserved politeness they showed to every one else. They must have thought that I had bowed to the general opinion at last.

For by this time our town had tacitly made up its mind; this sort of thing wouldn't do. Woman must do her work in the world. Our women all agreed on that—some because God had so appointed it, some because an enlightened view of the interest of society required it; some, it may be, because they suspected that if women stopped working they might have some trouble finding men who would support them. If Irita were so selfish as to refuse to do her part, and Sam were spineless enough to let her get away with it, that proved only that the Bradleys were an impious and anarchic pair whom any town or any college would be better off without. One by one the households of our town agreed on that; but underneath the smoothly restored surface of domestic harmony were spots still sore to the touch, and every sight of the Bradleys served as a reminder. I was beginning to hear—as dean, I heard everything—that our town would be happier if the Bradleys moved on.

I knew they must have heard that, too, and when I stayed away they must have thought their last friend had deserted them. I hated to think that Sam believed that; I couldn't endure letting Irita believe it. So one afternoon I called up and invited myself to supper, and the singing joy in her voice completed my ruin. I'd been so busy being surprised at what had happened to me that I had hardly wondered if it might be happening to her too. But if it had——

I strode out of my office, across the campus to the athletic field. It was one of those warm days in late February when spring seems to be in rehearsal, when a sudden sun brings steam from the thawing earth and imprudent buds to the trees, and early candidates for athletic honors out to run around the sodden cinder track. I climbed up on the bleachers and sat down to watch the runners, and presently somebody sat down beside me.

"Irita tells me you're coming to supper," said Sam. "That's fine."

"I've been so busy——" I said uneasily. "I don't like all this administrative work. I'm thinking of going back to Harvard."

"I wondered why you ever left Harvard," he admitted. "I've heard about some of the work you've been doing——"

"I came here to turn back the clock," I confessed. "And it won't turn. . . . At Harvard I was only one of the herd, but out here I could succeed to the presidency. And these people remembered me, I thought; I used to be All-State quarter-back. It was my peak, these college years here—better than being second secretary of a legation, writing notes about nothing, in correct French, for a minister to sign; better than being lost in the crowd at Harvard. . . . But I'd expected everybody to stand still and wait for me, and they didn't. Who cares now who was All-State quarter-back before the war? It was—a complex," I admitted. "The Grecian-urn complex. What the psychologists call adult infantilism."

"We all have a touch of it," Sam sighed. "We have an experience that looks like the most life can ever offer—and we want to keep it, freeze it, embalm it. Saint Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, for instance. That was the biggest moment in Peter's life, that far; and he wanted to build three tabernacles and stay right there. But Jesus knew that things don't last; you have to come down from the mountain and get back to work. . . . What I'd give to go back ten years, to the days when I was writing my book and was absolutely sure I was going to get somewhere—— But time won't stop; the old clock goes right on ticking. . . . I may move on myself next year."

"I never understood how we could have got you here at all," I said, not daring to say more.

"Irita had a touch of your disease. . . . But I'm tired of small colleges. I could go to Columbia, but——"

"I should think Columbia would suit you perfectly," I observed.

"Can't trust Junior to the public schools of New York—or Chicago; any big city. And we can't afford decent private schools. Of course there are big universities in smaller places—Princeton, Ann Arbor; but they'd expect me to write. And I've done my writing. . . . One book."

"But what a book!" I exploded. "Two hundred years from now people will begin to understand what you've done——"

"Maybe. But it was all I had to say, and I made the mistake of saying it too soon. Most men have

about one good job in them, I suppose. After that they might as well be chloroformed."

"What would you do," I asked him, "if you could do anything you wanted?"

"Buy the Metropolitan Museum in New York. I'd burn two-thirds of the stuff in it—a big bonfire in Central Park—and live with the rest. . . . But things being as they are, I try to do a good job as curator of the museums I can get. . . . Well—see you at half past six."

He clambered down the bleachers and walked away, the man of one book who had shot his bolt too soon. He would have seemed pathetic, if I could have thought of him as S. E. Bradley. But he was Irita's husband, too. . . .

The lazy mockery was gone from her eyes that night; she was contented and happy. I was happy, though not exactly contented. They came out on the porch with me, to say good-by—and then Sam was called back to the telephone. I stood with Irita, draining the fragrance of false spring, looking at a wind-swept sky of stars that burned like her eyes. I kissed her, with all the voltage of triple-distilled memories and a complex of fifteen years' growth. She shuddered in my arms——

"If you do that again——" she gasped wildly. But before I could do it again I heard Sam's returning footsteps.

I strode away across the campus, running into one or two necking parties of students who fled in horror at finding the dean on patrol. I wanted to tell them

to come back, not to mind me; that I knew exactly how they felt. For by now my disease had progressed to the really dangerous tertiary stage. I'd stopped hating losing control of myself; I thought I was absolutely in control of myself, that I was behaving sanely, adjusting myself to changed conditions as any organism should.

I loved Irita; she loved me. Well? We couldn't stay here after a divorce and remarriage, but great universities far away would be less censorious. . . . Her husband and child? Practically, they got along without her now. For it was appallingly clear that she hadn't loved Sam for years. If she'd loved him, she'd have got up to get his breakfast.

Not that I'd ask her to do that; I'd been used to going out to breakfast all my life. I'd let her see Junior as much as she liked, and Sam too; he'd be bitter at first, but in time our old friendship could be rebuilt. For of course all this would be done decently, without scandal; no sneaking embraces while the husband was out, only frank friendly discussion of things as they were.

And with Irita, I might at last do something with myself. . . .

So I mused, prowling, till the chapel clock struck three; then I came home to lie awake and continue my pleasant reflections till the alarm clock told me it was time to hustle out for breakfast at the Campus Tea Room. Mabel waved me a greeting as I gulped black coffee.

"You look worn out, John. Working too hard?"

"My job overloads me with detail. I'm thinking of going back to Harvard."

I'd expected her to be astonished; but nothing ever astonished Mabel.

"Harvard has its points," she said. "So have we. You can't have everything."

"No, but I can pick out what I want, and go after it, and get it."

"Some do and some don't," said Mabel. "You're lucky if you can see what you don't want, before you've gone after it and got it. It's no fun to go out for breakfast; but I'll bet it's easier if you don't leave a lazy wife snoring between the sheets."

"Mabel, you're crude."

"It's a crude world," she said. "I didn't make it."

I had work that kept me busy till ten o'clock, but every moment of those two hours I was recalling the frightened gladness of Irita's eyes as I kissed her. And when the chapel bell struck ten—— She'd be up by now; she couldn't sleep after last night. And Sam taught a class from ten to eleven. Now was the time to talk things over with her; then we could tell Sam, as gently as possible; and then——

A quiet divorce—I could pay her way to Reno; then Sam could go to Columbia, where he belonged. With no wife to support he could afford a good school for Junior; and Irita and I——

Stumbling, trembling, I went down the side street to her house; I rang the bell and waited an unconscionable time till she opened the door, disheveled and yawning.

"You?" she gasped inhospitably. "What a time of day!"

But she stood aside, and I walked in. Evidently she had slept, after last night; she was just out of bed. With her curly hair tousled, a faded green negligée tossed on over her nightgown, she was the most beautiful object I ever expect to see; but I wasn't in the mood to appreciate beauty just then. This was no setting for cool, dignified discussion; the scene had a guilty look. I ought to go away, till she had dressed.

"I—I'd thought we might talk things over," I stammered. And then, forgetting everything else—"I love you!" I said. "I love you——"

Breathless, with closed eyes, she clung to me, kissed me. . . .

"This is absurd!" she whispered presently. "After fifteen years!"

"But you're just the same," I told her. "Just the same——"

Her lips lifted, seeking mine; we held each other—— The door opened behind us; over her shoulder I saw Sam's face in the mirror. . . . I remembered now that he had no ten o'clock class on Thursdays. . . .

Abominable. Disgusting. Here I had prided myself that all this was to be done decently, with no sneaking embraces; and Sam had caught me kissing his wife in her nightgown. It would never have happened if the damned woman had got up at a decent hour of the morning.

V

But it had happened; the situation had to be faced. I tried to speak, but Sam beat me to it.

"Well, John! Sooner than I expected."

She tore herself from my arms.

"I hate you!" she blazed. Then, her heavy-lidded eyes turning to me—"I hate you both!"

"You'll feel better after you've had some coffee," Sam observed. "Better make yourself some while John and I talk things over."

"G-good idea," I agreed with chattering teeth, realizing that my stomach, if not my reason, had expected him to shoot me. "Talk things over. J-just what I came for."

"I don't doubt it," he agreed. "Sit down." He set the example, and lighted his pipe.

Irita lingered, regarding us sullenly.

"It seems to me I might have something to say about this," she complained. Sam's brows lifted.

"Do you think you'd better? At Amherst, if you remember, you didn't help much. . . . Oh, yes——" This to me, as I stared in horror. "Oh, yes, this has happened before. Perfectly natural. Men fall in love with her, everywhere we go, and she can't help responding occasionally. She doesn't ever want to, at first; but it's perfectly natural. I saw this coming, John, long before you did. Don't blame you at all. You think I'm not a fit mate for her. Well, I'm not—but I'm a damned good husband. I'll let her go when-

ever she wants to go, provided the man she goes to will take as good care of her as I do."

"I'll do that!" I promised. "She can sleep as late as she likes."

"Now as a matter of fact," said Sam, "she's been unfairly blamed for that. It was my idea; I knew that sleep is the best preservative of youth. It was hard work to win her around to it when Junior was a baby, but I set my foot down. . . . However, that's only part of it. You've seen what happened here. We made trouble in every household in town. Well, it happens everywhere. That's why we move around."

"It wouldn't happen at Harvard," I insisted; but my heart was cold.

"I'm not so sure of that. Cambridge is a large town but a professor and his wife move in a fairly small circle. Your friends' wives will find out that she has special privileges and they'll want them too. They'll probably perceive, on thinking it over, that it won't work in the average household; but they'll never forgive her for enjoying privileges they can't afford. Then you'll have to move on. For after all no wife likes to get up early. Neither does any husband, but somebody has to. And nobody will understand why, peculiarly, it ought to be her special privilege."

"Why?" I asked, wondering wildly if she had tuberculosis. Sam looked at his wife, and grinned; she looked at him, and flushed. I knew that somehow I'd given the wrong answer in an oral examination.

"Because she's Irita," he said. I stood up, waving my arms.

"Look here, you're trying to pretend you love her more than I do! But you don't! I've loved her for fifteen years. She never changes—a still unravished bride of quietness. She's the girl I've always loved—just the same. I love her still."

"I know, I know," he soothed me. "You've built your Grecian-urn complex around her. She's more than Irita to you—she's your lost youth, and the good old days, and everything you meant to be and aren't. To me she's just herself. . . . Well, John, you offer her something nobody else has ever offered. If she wants you you can have her—if you'll pay the price."

"I'm willing to pay any price——" I began.

"Of course you're willing; but can you? Remember, it means that you'll have to go out to breakfast every morning of your life, while your beautiful wife sleeps peacefully on in a warm bed. You'll have to plan everything—everything—for her convenience, not yours. For you're under more obligation than I am to preserve her beauty; your whole complex depends on her looking just as she did fifteen years ago.

"It won't be easy, John. You're going to be damned sorry for yourself now and then; and what will be harder to handle, she's going to be damned sorry for you—now and then. She'll want to get up at half past six to get your breakfast. But if you let her, she won't look like the girl you've remembered for fifteen years; she'll begin to look like other men's wives.

"You mustn't let her get up, even if she wants to. You'll have to take care of her. You'll have to be

prepared to move on—from one job to another, one town to another; to know that wherever you go all the married men will hate you and all the married women will despise you; and that Irita will love you desperately—about two weeks in each year. The rest of the time she'll be thinking, off and on, about divorcing you to marry somebody more exciting."

"What of it?" I shouted. "I love her anyway. I'll do anything for her! I want her at any price!"

"Yes, they all say that," said Sam wearily. "You've got the right spirit if you can master the technique. . . . Well, Irita?"

She rose and went to her husband, put her arms around him.

"Sam, you're the only man who ever really loved me. The only man who ever understood me. The only man I'd ever want to live with——"

Stooping, she kissed his bald spot. I fled.

VI

Well, you get over things like that. Two months later I had recovered far enough to ask Sam Bradley a question that was gnawing me. (For we were still good friends, Sam and I; even Irita and I were beginning to be friends again.)

"Sam," I said, "what do you get out of it? For making all allowance for the two weeks of every year when she loves you desperately——"

"Well, it's this way, John. Any man of sense gets rid of his complexes as soon as he can. He finds out

what he can do; then he goes and does it, regardless. I said my say in that one book, and for a while I felt as if I had no more excuse for taking up room on the earth. And then I found another job that only I could handle. I love beauty—beautiful things, beautiful people. I'm a joke to look at, myself; but I saw that in Irita I had a specimen worth preserving, and I learned how to do it. I suppose I could make a million a year rejuvenating fat rich women if I dressed up my treatment with a little hocus-pocus. . . . I'd like to own the Elgin marbles and the Vaphio cups, but I can't. However, I'm lucky enough to live with Irita; in my small way, I'm the curator of a museum. And you ought to thank me, you and everybody else who has been cheered up by her beauty; all you sentimentalists who need a symbol."

"But what do you get out of it?" I persisted.

"Why, I get Irita." (Yes, he certainly did.) "I can't work miracles; she'll fade some day—though, at thirty-six, she's good for at least a dozen years more. But there's Junior—he's a superior person. If I bring him up right, I'll have done my job."

"But is it worth being driven out, as you're driven out everywhere?"

"I'm going to Columbia next fall. We've managed to get Junior a free scholarship in a good school, and maybe New York is so big that nobody will care when my wife gets up or where I eat breakfast. If it isn't, we'll move on again. . . . Worth it? Well, I think so. There are times when I'd like to lie in bed till noon, and have somebody bring me my breakfast and the

morning papers; but you can't have everything. That's beside the point, anyway. There are only two kinds of people—the ones who let the others worry and the ones who do the worrying that has to be done; the sons of Mary and the sons of Martha. I'm a son of Martha and I do my stuff."

VII

So they went, and I stayed. Old Doctor Akeley was gathered to his reward last summer; and I'm living in the President's Mansion, alone but for a couple of servants who cost as much as associate professors. But I'll not be alone long; I'm going to be married in the Christmas holidays.

To whom? Mabel Martin, of course. She's a remarkable woman, Mabel; no complexes about her. She keeps faith with her public; no college president could ask for a more helpful wife. I know she'll make me happy, and I rather hope I'll make her happy; I think I can be a pretty good husband for a woman who does her part, even if I haven't the talent to be curator of a museum. . . . Once I dreamed of living with flawless undying beauty, while Time stood still; but Time doesn't stand still and you can't have everything. You've got to come down from the mountain. . . . Does Mabel ever suspect that I feel like that? Well, perhaps; there isn't much that gets past Mabel. But I know she'll never mention it, never hold it against me. For all I know, she may have come down from a mountain too.

JEALOUS MISTRESS

MR. WILLARD HARPINGTON of Harpington & Company, investment bankers, who usually left the office early, had been detained this evening till after seven. He felt affronted and put upon as he went out through the chain of dark and empty rooms, deserted by clerks and not yet invaded by scrubwomen. After dinner he would muse in well-fed content on the smooth organization that enabled his house to get its business transacted in good time, unless something unusual was afoot in Wall Street; but just now he thought it was an outrage that nobody worked overtime but the head of the firm. And then he saw a reassuring blur of light on a ground-glass door; young George Graham was working late, too.

Might have expected that, thought Mr. Harpington. Graham was the most promising of the younger men in the office; a few years more and he'd be ripe for a partnership. But in the meantime—— With a sudden benevolent impulse, Mr. Harpington tapped at the door. George looked up peevishly from a mass of papers spread out in the light of a desk lamp; then, recognizing his caller, he rose in haste.

"Just wondered what was keeping you so late, Graham."

"I've been analyzing these reports on the trend of business in Oklahoma, in connection with that South-

western Groceries bond issue. I wasn't satisfied with the summary we got from the statistical department."

"That's right," said Mr. Harpington. "Nothing like thoroughness. But you might as well leave that till morning, Graham. Better go home to dinner; young women who haven't been married very long don't like to have their husbands work late. A job a man loves can be a jealous mistress; but your wife has a claim on your time, too."

"Thanks, sir. But I'm afraid I'd better finish this now."

"Well, as you like. But don't feel that you have to do everything all at once. You'll be with this firm another forty years, I hope."

George, who hoped so too, was ashamed to look at his chief as he said good night; ashamed to admit that he didn't care a damn, at the moment, about the trend of business in Oklahoma. He was analyzing it, while he waited with fading hope for a telephone call from his wife, to keep himself from wondering where she was, and whether he'd see her to-night.

His wife had a job too, and a more jealous one than his.

She was Mrs. Graham under the law but she was Janet Carrier on the card above the door-bell, and Janet Carrier to readers of the *Morning Express*. She and George had met on vacation, a year ago last summer, and fallen in love at sight. They agreed that a wife had a right to keep her name, and her job. Of course they'd want children, eventually; but Janet was just beginning to make a name as a reporter. In

two or three years, when success was an old story, she could give up her job and have her children; and then perhaps write plays. So all was lovely till they came back from the honeymoon and realized that they wouldn't see much of each other, with George working from nine in the morning to five in the afternoon, and Janet working from one in the afternoon to one in the morning.

"Why don't you get a job on an evening paper?" he suggested. "Then we'd have the same hours."

"But, darling, I'd be ashamed to leave the *Express* so soon after they'd given me a raise and started letting me sign my stories. Besides," said Janet sagely, "it might not be good for us to be together all the time. Too much intimacy takes the edge off emotion. But if we can always be a luxury to each other——"

So they took a two-room non-housekeeping apartment in the Village. George had to get up at seven, and at first she insisted that he wake her so that she could kiss him good-by. But she couldn't always go back to sleep, and you need sleep when you work twelve hours a day. So George stopped singing in his shower, and learned to close the door softly as he tiptoed out to breakfast in the restaurant in the basement. At first, too, he used to wake up when she came home in the small hours of the morning; but he couldn't always go back to sleep afterward, and you need sleep when you're trying to get ahead in Wall Street. After the first year they took a new apartment, with separate bedrooms.

They dined together when they could; and after

dinner he went to a movie, or to the Harvard Club, or home to read, while she went back to work. But they could do that only when she had an afternoon assignment that could be neatly cleaned up by dinner time. Sometimes they hardly saw each other all week.

But on Sunday, Mr. and Mrs. Graham got reacquainted. They slept till noon, and breakfast-lunched at the Brevoort, and told each other everything that had happened since last Sunday. In the afternoon they went to a concert, or a museum, or a cocktail party; and on Sunday night they entertained her friends, or his. (Her friends and his didn't mix.) It was a great life—thought George, absently regarding the reports on the trend of business in Oklahoma—to be married to Janet, even twenty-four hours a week. But six days out of seven he was a bachelor. Janet was a bachelor, too.

At this point in his musing, the telephone rang.

"Hello, dear!" said his wife's voice. "What luck to reach you, so late as this! I'm dining at Barbuti's. Can you come up?"

"I'll start in five minutes. Got to finish a little job first."

He was ashamed to let her guess that he'd been waiting for that telephone call for two hours.

II

Barbuti's, just off Times Square, was near three or four newspaper offices. George had counted on having his wife to himself, but he found her at a corner

table with Metcalf of the *Record,* and Weinberg of the *Chronicle,* and Ray Barr of the *Express;* they'd all commenced dinner. Of course when her friends, men who worked with her, came in and sat down at her table and asked her to have a drink, her husband could hardly expect——

"Well, here's old George!" they said. " 'Lo, George. We saved a place for you." George took it; his wife smiled across the table.

"Tired, dear?" she asked. He shook his head. You couldn't admit you were tired, even if you were, in the presence of men who would do four or five more hours of work before they called it a day.

"What have you been doing?" he asked her.

"Hearing of the East Side Women's Committee on Unemployment, before the Board of Estimate. Good story; Reba Harnitz called the Mayor a bloody tool of capitalism, and got thrown out."

"Must have been lively," George agreed. "Were you all there?"

"No, the rest of us are doing the bond robberies," said Metcalf.

"I suppose they'll pin that on Rags Connally," George suggested, proud to show them that he knew the inside story. They stared.

"Pin it on Rags?" Weinberg snorted. "When he's so close to—— Well, you know who I mean. Unless Janet's been holding out on you."

"Yes, I know whom you mean," said George sourly. He wished to God she wouldn't let everybody call her Janet. . . . But Weinberg had known her longer

than he had; he supposed in some ways Weinberg knew her better. They had more in common.

They went on talking, the newspapermen and the newspaperwoman, while George ate in silence. What could he say? They weren't interested in the trend of business in Oklahoma, and he didn't blame them. Every day they were flung into contact with something more immediate, more exciting. They talked eagerly, in cryptic short-cuts, about the things they had in common. They were polite enough to George; he knew they liked him, in a vague indifferent way; a pretty good guy for Wall Street, they'd call him. But he didn't belong. . . . His friends liked Janet quite differently; they were rather dazzled by that pretty Miss Carrier of the *Express,* who knew so much about the inside of everything. Quite right, George reflected; she was more interesting than her husband. Her job was more interesting than his; though hers paid seventy-five a week and his paid two hundred.

They finished dinner, prepared to go back to work.

"What are you doing to-night?" George asked his wife.

"Dinner of the Sons of the Founding Fathers. Senator Holman's the big speaker, with Admiral Kellock as a runner-up."

"That's easy," said Ray Barr. "Holman always sends in a copy of his speech, and the Admiral says the same thing at every dinner—a technical talk about the proper composition of the battle fleet. He's afraid to say anything out loud, with the administration so hot for disarmament."

"You might be home early, then," George suggested.

"Depends on what the Senator says," said Janet. "I'd better stop in at the office now, and look over his canned copy. Going back with me, Ray?" Ray Barr shook his head.

"I've got a date with Rags Connally, later on, at the Lisette Club. He won't tell me anything, but I've got to cultivate my sources. . . . You'll be cleaned up early on that dinner, Jan; why don't you come on up and meet Rags, and dance a little? He's a useful man to know; dances well, too. . . . Come along with us, George, if you'd like."

He meant well, George reflected; he didn't intend to be patronizing.

"George goes to bed early," said his wife. "I'll turn up, Ray, if I get through before midnight. . . . Good night, George darling."

He wanted to kiss her; he might not see her again for three days. But he knew she was self-conscious about kissing her husband before her friends; though not about kissing her friends before her husband.

This couldn't go on, thought George as he walked home. Settled in his armchair in the living-room, with a book in his lap that he didn't read and a pipe in his mouth that he forgot to light, he knew it couldn't go on. To-night he wanted a wife who'd go dancing with him, and he had a wife he wouldn't see till Sunday. He knew half a dozen girls who'd go dancing with him, if he called them up; but he didn't want them. He wanted the girl who was going up to the

Lisette Club to dance with Ray Barr, and that unconvicted felon Rags Connally. He wanted to buy her a five-hundred-dollar evening gown—he could afford it—and take her out to a smart restaurant where people would whisper to one another: "Look! It's Mrs. George Graham. Isn't she lovely?"

But Janet Carrier insisted on buying her own clothes; and she had little use for evening gowns when she worked every night but Sunday.

Janet's husband realized that he was jealous. Not of any man—yet; he wished he were. If it had been a man who was alienating her from him he could have competed, tried to win her back. But he was competing against the job she loved, her jealous mistress. Exactly that. He felt as helpless, as disarmed in competition, as if she were in love with a woman.

And he couldn't blame her for being in love with her job. He had seen enough of her work, absorbed enough of her viewpoint, to realize that reporting was a good deal more exciting than his work. No money in it, of course; she supported herself but he'd have to support their children. . . . If they ever had any children; they hadn't talked of children for months. . . . No, this couldn't go on.

For if it went on he could foresee the end. Some day he'd have to be jealous—hopelessly jealous, by that time—of a man with whom she had more in common, a man who shared her daily work, her most absorbing interest. She and George shared an apartment and a telephone number, and a desire that still burned brightly once a week, when their engagements

left them time to think about it. But they couldn't go on for ever, on nothing but that.

There was only one way out, George perceived; and decided that he might as well wait up for her, and put it up to her to-night. She'd have to give up her job. If they were going to stay married they'd have to have the same hours and, within reason, the same interests. They could live in comfort on his salary; and while she loved her work she loved him too. She wouldn't like to give up her job; but if he made her realize that this was the only way to save their marriage——

She came in at half past twelve, carrying a copy of the first edition still damp from the press.

"Hello!" she said. "You're up late. . . . Lord, I'm tired!"

"Did you go dancing with Barr, and meet Rags Connally?"

"Couldn't. I got a big story—exclusive, too." She tossed him the paper. "Read it, while I get my things off."

He looked at the front page—

ADM. KELLOCK FLAYS
U. S. FOREIGN POLICY

Disarmament Insane, He Says, While State Department Provokes Foreign Powers

---

By Janet Carrier

He finished the story as she came back, in negligée and sandals.

"Poor old Kellock!" she said. "He was slated for command of the battle fleet next spring; but the administration's so touchy that he'll be lucky if they let him resign to escape court martial. Too bad. He's a nice old fellow, as Admirals go." She lit a cigarette.

"But what on earth got into him?" George asked.

"Champagne, of course. . . . He was the last speaker. All the other reporters left after Senator Holman finished—even the City News man. Holman had given us some good stuff, and we all know the Admiral's usual line. I don't know why I stayed—I wanted to go dancing. But somehow I had a hunch something was going to break."

"Then if you hadn't stayed—— Good God!" said George. "You've ruined a man—a pretty big man, too. A man you knew and liked!" She shrugged.

"What could I do? He said it, and I heard it."

"If no other reporters were there, you could have forgotten it."

"That's not what I'm paid for, to forget things. . . . It's a shame, of course; but I didn't do it, he did it. I was just the—the Recording Angel." George shook his head.

"I should think you'd never want to cover a news story again."

"Why not? It's too bad if nice old gentlemen get stewed and talk too much; but when they do that they let themselves in for something. I can't help

it if I'm the instrument. Makes me feel like the hand of God. . . . But what an opportunity!" she said. "My God, what an opportunity! The sort of thing you dream about—a big story breaking when nobody else is there!"

She smiled, and put out her cigarette, and came over and sat on his knee.

"And the nicest part of an evening like this," she said, "is to come home and find you. I'm so glad I didn't go dancing with Ray Barr. . . . Love me?"

"You know it!" he told her. And that was that.

Very much that, he realized later, lying awake. She'd never give up her job, and he couldn't blame her. It wasn't every job that enabled you to feel, now and then, like the hand of God. . . . So there was only one other way out if they were to save their marriage; and it was worth saving, George decided, at any cost.

The next evening he dined at the Harvard Club; and after dinner, in the lounge, he sought out Delbert Hall.

III

Considering the difference in their ages George knew Delbert Hall fairly well. He was vice-president of a railroad, but that wasn't why George had hunted him up. Delbert Hall had once worked for Dana on the old *Sun*.

"Hello!" said Hall. "How's everything at Harpington's?"

"Pretty dull," George confessed. "They're nice people, but my job bores me." (As it did, sometimes.)

"Every job's a bore, sometimes. You ought to thank God for a job you're through with for the evening when you leave the office. Take a newspaperman," said Hall. "He's never off duty. Why, I remember one night when I worked for Dana on the old *Sun* I was taking a girl home from the theater, on my night off, when we ran into a three-alarm fire—people jumping from the windows, and all that. I gave her cab hire and sent her home alone. She never forgave me, of course; and I was quite hipped on her."

"Still, it's work that keeps you interested," George offered. "My wife's a reporter—Janet Carrier of the *Express*. She loves it."

"How long has she been at it? . . . Three years? Yes, the glamour lasts about that long."

"It sounds good, when she and her friends talk about it."

"You'll wish they'd talk about something else, after a while. I know bankers and lawyers and business men who can talk intelligently about painting, and music, and science, and politics, and philosophy. But newspapermen never talk anything but shop."

"Well, anyway——" said George desperately. "I suppose a lot of the men you worked with are newspaper executives now. I wish you'd give me letters to some of them. I want a newspaper job."

"What?" said Delbert Hall. "You want——?"

"I could get one through Janet or her friends,"

George pursued, "but I'd rather not do it that way. If you'd give me some letters——"

"What's the idea? I saw old Willard Harpington the other day, and he said you were coming along fine. If you stay with him you'll be a millionaire in ten years."

"I don't want to be a millionaire," George protested. (He didn't, if it meant losing Janet.) "I want to be a newspaperman. I—I think I'd like the life."

"Oh, you do, do you? Graham, do you know why I quit the newspaper business? Partly because I needed money, but mostly because I got tired of sitting around. It sounds good when you hear about the high spots; but most of a reporter's life is just sitting around, waiting for some fellow to come back from lunch, or out of conference, and tell you he's got nothing to say. So I took a job where I can make the other fellow sit around. I can see how you feel," Hall conceded. "Your wife and her friends talk as if it's something good that they're in on and you're out of. Don't worry, my boy. Fifteen years from now those fellows will be coming around and asking you if you don't want a public relations counsel."

He paused to light a cigar, and George had not the heart to speak up.

"Anyway," Hall resumed, "the newspaper business isn't what it used to be. What Dana would say if he could see the sheets they get out nowadays—— All the good reporters are dead, I guess."

"My wife's a good reporter," said George loyally.

"Not that she put me up to this. She doesn't even know about it, yet."

"Then you can still drop it," said Hall in relief. "Look here, Graham—assuming that you've got the talent to make good in an exacting and badly paid business, which isn't certain; assuming that even if you make good, you really will like it—which isn't certain either—have you thought how your wife will feel about it? If you happen to be a flop, she'll be ashamed of you. If you happen—and it's not impossible—to turn out to be better than she is, then she'll hate you. Have you thought about that?"

George hadn't.

"All the same," he said, "I want to try it. I know I'll have to start at the bottom, of course——"

"And you'll be throwing away a good salary and a great future," said Hall inexorably, "for a crazy notion. . . . However, if you're bound to attempt suicide, I suppose I'll have to buy the poison for you. Got any preference among papers?"

"It would have to be a morning paper, so that my wife and I could keep the same hours. And not the *Express,* of course, where she works."

"Then I'll send you up to Delano, on the *Record.* . . . You might like the life at that," said Delbert Hall. "I get pretty sick of Wall Street myself sometimes. Now in the old days, when I was working for Dana——"

IV

Delano, city editor of the *Record,* read Hall's letter and leaned back in his swivel chair, hands clasped behind his head.

"Young man," he announced, "I think you're crazy. To give up a job you're good at for a job you've never tried; to give up money—— How much do they pay you, down at Harpington's?"

"Two hundred a week," said George modestly.

"Two hundred? My God! That's what I get, and I've been a newspaperman for twenty-seven years—a good one, too. I'd start you at twenty; and if you ever work up to two hundred you'll be damn lucky. Still want to try it?" George nodded. "Well," said Delano cheerfully, "we've had some crazy goofs on this paper, but I can't remember that we ever had an outright paranoiac before. And I'm curious to see if a paranoiac can get news. Report at one o'clock Monday, and don't forget you provide your own typewriter."

Now that it was done, George began to see how crazy it was—or would be, but for the reason he had not dared avow. Certainly it was going to be a little hard to explain to Janet. He was rather glad, when he got home, to find a telegram from her; she had been sent to Boston to cover a convention of women's clubs, and wouldn't be home till Sunday. That put off one explanation; but it was hard enough to explain to Willard Harpington that he was throwing

up a good job and a bright future, to work twelve hours a day for twenty dollars a week.

Janet came home tired and disgusted; she had had to treat solemnly, at its face value, a convention that cried for polite derision; she said it made her want to throw up her job. So it was late Sunday night before he dared tell her that from now on it was his job too.

"What?" she gasped. "What did you do that for?"

"Well," said George uncomfortably, "we'll have the same hours. That will be something."

"Something," she agreed. "I don't know just what." She pondered a while, glancing up at him now and then with a queer awed foreboding. "We'd better sublet the apartment," she said at last, "and move to a hotel room near your office and mine. . . . Yes, just one room; if our joint income is going to shrink from fourteen thousand to five we'll have to economize. And I'll pay the rent; you'll need your twenty a week for cigarettes and telephones and carfare."

"I won't let you pay it all. I've got five thousand in the bank——"

"Keep it there; we'll need it, if either of us ever gets sick. And thank God you've got it. I've never saved a cent; I spent it as fast as I got it because you were piling up money. In other words, I never did my part. . . . Well, I will now."

"Janet, it isn't fair for me to put that burden on you."

"It's little enough," she said, "compared to the other burden you've put on me. . . . And on yourself too,

of course. . . . You did this so we'd have the same hours, didn't you? So we wouldn't drift apart."

"Well—yes!" he said. "This thing of being married on Sundays only won't work. Not for long. It's got to be all or nothing."

"In other words, you're asking me to marry you. Or rather you've married me without even asking me. . . . We've never been married, George. We went through a ceremony, but we never tried to share the same life, the same interests. We've just been having a week-end affair—a perfectly proper affair that wouldn't shock our most conservative friends. That was lovely—but rather cowardly; we didn't risk anything. Married people risk something, unmarried lovers risk something else; but we risked nothing at all. Well—we do now."

"We give up money; but I don't see what else——"

"Oh, don't you?" she said. "We've never tried to live together seven days a week. We never bored each other; we didn't see enough of each other. We never had enough intimacy to take the edge off. But with the same hours, in one room, we'll get it now. . . . I'm still in love with you and I know you're still in love with me; but that's all we have in common. Well, now we'll have everything in common—and I wonder if we'll be able to stand it. Maybe the reason we've got along so well as lovers is that we never met on any other basis; you had your life and I had mine. Anybody can have an affair; but to make a marriage work takes stuff. . . . We'd better quit pretending we're ever going to have any children," she

mused. "While I'm a reporter it's out of the question; if you're a reporter I won't be able to afford to give up my job. . . . If we'd cooled off as lovers, George, we might still have been able to get along pretty well as partners by transferring our interest to children; or to your job, and mine. This way we force ourselves on each other; we've got to get along together, seven days a week—or we smash up hopelessly."

"I'm an ass! I never thought of all this. I ought to have talked it over with you before I did it."

"I'm glad you didn't; I'd never have had the nerve to try it. But now that it's done I'll see it through. I'm risking less than you are, I suspect. Only—— Well, it's all or nothing."

"All!" he told her, with more confidence than he felt by now.

"Oh, I hope so, darling! I hope so! I do love you, you know!"

"Of course it may not last," he reminded her. "I mean—Delano will give me about three months to see if I can hold down a newspaper job. If I can't, I suppose I'll have to look for something else in Wall Street."

"I'm not worried about that—only about what might happen to us. . . . I've been spoiled," she said. "Spoiled by that pleasant little week-end affair, without risk and without responsibility. I don't know whether this will work or not; but I think ten times as much of you, George, as I ever did in my life before—because you weren't afraid to try."

V

Afterward they laughed at the remembered apprehensions of that night. For it turned out to be the best thing that had ever happened to them.

Granted one thing, the meteoric rise of George Graham to the front rank of New York reporters was inevitable. He happened to have the rare talent for getting news, even when people were trying to hide it from him; and the complementary talent—which doesn't always come with the other—for writing news well when he had got it. Those twin gifts can be educated; but they can no more be created unless the seeds are there than the special aptitudes that make a Ty Cobb or a Toscanini. But George Graham happened to have them both, and he had everything else.

It takes time to learn the routine of news getting, unless you've rehearsed it at a school of journalism. George, without realizing it, had been attending a private school of journalism for the past two years. The mechanics of his trade he had learned from his wife, as naturally as an observant man married to a Frenchwoman learns to speak French. Moreover, he had taken honors at Harvard, studied economics at the University of London and politics at the Sorbonne; he had worked three years in Wall Street, in a position of some responsibility. So when he was sent after a story he not only found out what had happened, but knew what it meant. He made mistakes, of course; but he never made the same mistake twice.

In a year the *Record* was paying him almost as much as the *Express* paid his wife—almost a third as much, that is, as the salary he had given up at Harpington's. But man does not live by bread alone; George liked the life, and wondered why he had wasted three years at a desk in Wall Street. His salary and Janet's kept them both comfortably, in a two-room hotel suite near his office and hers. Two rooms are enough, if you happen to be in love with the person who shares them with you; and they were in love as they had never been in the days of their week-end marriage.

There, too, the perils they had anticipated never materialized. They had little chance to bore each other, for they both worked twelve hours a day. Aside from Sundays they saw each other only at breakfast, and at the light supper they used to eat together before they went to bed. The work they shared gave them a common interest, and plenty to talk about. And the jealousy that Delbert Hall had foreseen, if George got to be as good as his wife at her job, never got a foothold because there was nothing for it to feed on.

For George had specialized, as soon as he showed enough ability to be permitted to specialize, in international affairs, for which his education fitted him; and Janet was beginning to specialize in police reporting. She developed a quite remarkable talent for winning the confidence of a woman who had murdered her husband or her lover, and extracting the story of her life. So for all their common interest

they never competed against each other; each could be proud of the other with no heartburnings. They had learned to work together, to talk together, to live together seven days a week. In short they were really married at last, and they liked it.

They had vacations from each other—incalculable, unforeseen vacations—assignments that took one or the other out of town for two days, a week, a fortnight; separations whose unexpectedness gave them a little shock of loss, and added flavor to their reunion. But they were never separated for more than two weeks at a time till George's third year on the *Record,* when a revolution broke out in Mexico.

George, who spoke Spanish, had become acquainted with the Mexican exiles in New York who had plotted the uprising. With that background, he was the natural choice for the assignment to cover the revolution for the *Record*—first from El Paso, then as a war correspondent in the field with the main rebel army. He and Janet were rather appalled at the prospect of a separation that might last for months; but there was no help for it; this was his job and she had hers. After it was over, they'd take a holiday together. . . .

It was six months before the triumphant revolutionists marched into Mexico City. George and Janet rarely wrote to each other; mail delivery to the army in the field was uncertain, and there was no point in telling each other what they were doing when they could find it out by looking at the papers. Janet saw her husband's name on the front page of the *Record* every morning; and when George looked over a file

of the *Express* in the American Embassy in Mexico City, he saw his wife's name all over the front page. While he had been marching with the revolutionists she had accomplished her most spectacular triumph. The famous and wealthy Mr. Frobenshaw was found murdered in his house on Fifth Avenue—the biggest police story of the decade, which threatened to become the biggest unsolved mystery. It was Janet who noticed, when the grief-stricken widow received reporters, that she was wearing a different scent from the one she was known to have worn on the day of the murder. From that clue Janet worked alone, remorselessly, indefatigably. And the day George came back from Mexico Mrs. Frobenshaw was indicted for murder, on the evidence Janet had discovered.

She got a two-hundred-dollar bonus for that and they both got two weeks off. They spent their holiday at the bungalow colony on Cape Cod where they had first met five years before, and came back brown, glowing, utterly delighted with their rediscovery of each other. She went back to her office, he went back to his—and the managing editor sent for him.

"Well, your Mexican friends are in," he observed, "and next week they may be out again. I don't suppose you've read the papers on your vacation, but there are new rebellions already, in Chiapas and Sonora. Every one of your revolutionary generals wanted to be President, and only one of them can be it at a time. . . . Graham, we need a new correspondent in Mexico City; Headley was too close to the old régime. You're the man, of course."

"You mean I'd have to stay there permanently?"

"Nothing's permanent in the newspaper business. But you'd better be prepared to stay two or three years, at least."

"I see," said George. "I've got one or two things to arrange first——"

When Janet came home at midnight George had digested the Mexican news in the evening papers, and the dispatches that would be in to-morrow morning's *Record;* and he was in a stew of excitement. Hell was popping; he wanted to get down there and see it, and tell the world about it. But when he told his wife——

"My God!" she said. "We've had two weeks together after six months apart—and now they want to send you off again! . . . Please don't go."

He looked at her in blank amazement.

"Not go? Why, Jan, I've been right in the middle of this thing; I am still. I know all these fellows personally—the ones who are in, and the ones who are trying to get them out. I know more about what's going on down there than any other American newspaperman. I can't stay out of it."

"But how about me?" she asked. "The *Express* has a perfectly good Mexico City correspondent. They wouldn't send me, anyway; all I know about Mexico is what I've picked up from you. I don't even speak Spanish."

"You'd learn it. You could do magazine stuff, free-lance work——"

"Free-lance work!" she said scornfully. "Besides,

I've got to be here for the Frobenshaw trial. Not just a reporter; as the star witness."

"You could come back for that. It's in October, isn't it?"

"They'll never get her to trial in October. A woman with fifty million dollars, indicted for murder, can use up a lot of law before she ever looks at a jury. And with her uncle's political influence—— George, this story may split the town wide open! And I'm right in the middle of it; I have been all along. I can't stay out of it."

"No," he agreed. "I guess you can't." A sudden chill depression settled on them both.

"There's got to be some way out!" she said desperately. "George, I'm afraid. Please don't go to Mexico."

"Jan, I'm worth ten times as much to the *Record* as any other man they could send there. If I refused that assignment I might as well throw up my job. . . . I know—I threw up a job once before, to —to save our marriage." She started; she looked at him, her eyes bleak with foreboding. "But that was— a different job," he finished.

"Yes," she said. "I can't ask you to throw up this assignment. And you can't ask me to run out on the Frobenshaw case, even if the District Attorney would let me, now. . . . It's a queer triangle, isn't it—you and I and the jealous mistress we both love? . . . I wish—— I was going to say I wished you'd never left Harpington's. Only that wouldn't be true. . . .

George——" This was almost a shriek. "What are we going to do about it?"

"They're bound to finish that Frobenshaw trial some time this winter!" he said fiercely. "You'll come to me, won't you, as soon as it's over?"

"Oh, yes, darling—yes! I do love you! I'll come to you as soon as ever I'm free. . . . Or maybe," she said, "things will quiet down in Mexico sooner than we think——"

Three years later Mrs. Frobenshaw went to the electric chair, after a trial and conviction, a reversal by the Court of Appeals, a new trial and a second conviction, a vain appeal to the United States Supreme Court, and a political upheaval that cost the Police Commissioner his job and got the District Attorney elected Governor.

And things hadn't quieted down in Mexico.

VI

Gray-haired George Graham, city editor of the *Star-Chronicle,* walked across the railed enclosure to his assistant's desk.

"Where's last night's schedule?" he demanded. "Who did the obits?"

"McCarthy," the assistant reported. "What's the matter?" George pointed to an item on the obituary page, under a Hollywood date line.

Janet Carrier, scenario writer for the Climaxo Picture Corporation, died last night of injuries

received in an automobile crash. Her best known work was *Slaves of Sin,* adapted from Leo Tolstoy's novel, *War and Peace.* Miss Carrier had been divorced twice. Her third husband, Hippolyte O'Banion, motion picture director, survives her.

"Well?" said the assistant, a young man from Boston who knew of Janet Carrier only as the author of *Slaves of Sin.* George Graham grunted in disgust.

"Janet Carrier was a well known newspaperwoman around this town, fifteen or twenty years ago. She was the one that pinned the Frobenshaw murder on the wife, and did more than anybody else to get Frank Maddux elected Governor. If McCarthy'd only gone to the morgue he'd have found an envelope stuffed with clippings about her; but I suppose he was too lazy to look. I've seen men fired for less than that, when I worked for Delano on the old *Record.*" He paused, and began to roll a cigarette. "The newspaper business isn't what it used to be," he pronounced. "All the good reporters are dead, I guess. Janet Carrier——"

He broke off, feeling in his pockets for a match. . . . Amazing how the years had blurred his memories of her—the most intimate memories blurred most of all. But he hadn't had time to think about her. He was a newspaperman; he had something else to think about, twelve hours a day; something fresh to think about every morning. Between him and her it had had to be all or nothing; and between each of

them and the job it had been all or nothing, too. So in the long run the jealous mistress had got it all; and the memory of the life George Graham and Janet Carrier had lived together was distant and dim, a tale told long ago, all but forgotten. . . .

But one memory was as clear as ever.

"Janet Carrier," he said, "was a damn good reporter. And this paper ought to have said so." He became aware of an office boy, waiting for his attention. "Well?" he grunted.

The boy handed him a card, and a letter on the stationery of Harpington & Company, investment bankers. George tore it open—

Dear Graham—

This will introduce Mr. Ellery Felton, just graduated from Princeton. He is a cousin of my wife and I offered him a position with our firm; but he tells me that he wants to be a newspaperman. Since you too had this ambition, and realized it so brilliantly, I venture to send him to you in the hope that you may be able to find a place for him.

With the warmest of personal greetings, and regret that we see so little of each other, I am

Cordially yours,

WILLARD HARPINGTON, II.

"Brilliantly!" George snorted. "All right, Jimmy. Bring him in."

He shook hands with a pink and earnest young

man; then leaned back in his swivel chair, hands clasped behind his head.

"Sit down, Mr. Felton. . . . So you could have a job with Harpington, but you want to be a newspaperman. Why?"

"Well, sir, I've done a little writing. And I—I think I'd like the life."

"Oh, you do? You'd work while your friends sleep, and sleep while they work; in other words you'd soon have no friends but other newspapermen. You'd work twelve hours a day; and you'd spend most of that time sitting around, waiting for somebody to come back from lunch, or out of conference, and tell you he had nothing to say. . . . Engaged to be married, by any chance?"

"Y-yes, sir," stammered Mr. Felton, astonished at this clairvoyance.

"Well, if you want the girl, you take that job with Harpington. Otherwise the kindest thing you can do to her is to punch her in the face and tell her you hope you'll never see her again. You'll have no home life if you work for me."

"But——" said Mr. Felton. "But other men——"

"Other men park their families in Flatbush or the Bronx, and see them one day a week. And you'll have a hell of a time sending your sons to Princeton on a newspaperman's salary. I worked for the Harpingtons three years, and when I quit I was getting as much as I'm getting now, after twenty years in the newspaper business. And I'm one of the good ones," said George Graham. "I'm successful. I happened

to have enough executive ability to hold down a good job. You might chase news till your legs go back on you, and then have to settle down on the copy desk at seventy dollars a week. Mrs. Harpington's cousin, with any stuff at all, can't help becoming a millionaire. If you turn your back on that to work twelve hours a day for newspaper wages, you're crazy."

"Maybe I am, sir." Young Mr. Felton was pink and moist, but through his confusion burned the undissuadable confidence of twenty-two. "I know that's all true, Mr. Graham. But I think I'd like the life."

George Graham finished rolling his cigarette, felt in his pockets for a match.

"You might," he conceded. "Some of us do. . . . Joe!" he called to the head office boy. "Clear out a desk for this man, and show him where to hang up his hat."

LOCKSMITHS LAUGH AT LOVE

"I THINK it would be lovely," she said pensively, "if you and I should have an affair."

"Delightful!" he agreed, dropping her hand in panic haste. Sylvia leaned back against the wall of the restaurant booth, faintly smiling.

"I mean it, Stan." He hadn't doubted it. She meant everything she said, and said everything she meant. "I'm sorry if you're not enthusiastic about it," she added rather acridly.

"Of course I'm enthusiastic! It's only that——"

He paused. Their long comradely friendship had taken on a new warmth of late, since they'd begun making love. . . . But neither of them wanted to get married, yet; and anything else, with Sylvia—— Back home their families lived next door; they had grown up together; he had promised her mother that he would take care of her, in New York.

"It's only," he said, "that I hadn't dreamed you cared so much."

"Oh, Lord, Stan! This isn't 1884! I'm not in love with you, if that's what you mean. I'm not the type that falls in love, the way our ancestors meant it. But if you——"

She broke off. The stuffy warmth of the restaurant was thick with the buzz of voices, the high cackle

of laughter. He hated noisy crowds; there had been a time when Sylvia hated them too. But probably she had got used to places like this, going around with Bull Cardigan.

He realized that she was waiting for him to say something.

"You know I've always been crazy about you——" he began dutifully.

"Rot! It's just because I know you haven't that I suggested this. I wouldn't have an affair with a man who was crazy about me, unless I was crazy about him too. It wouldn't be fair. I've always said that."

Her emphasis on the "always" sounded as if she had said it recently, and with a personal application. He scowled; everybody knew that Bull Cardigan was crazy about her.

"But you and I," she went on, "like each other and trust each other and know all about each other; and there's never been any sentimental nonsense between us. . . . Oh, yes, you asked me to marry you once, back home—because it was your duty; because we'd been intended for each other ever since we were babies. It always made me sick, knowing that everybody expected us to get married. As if what we thought about it didn't count."

"I remember what I thought about it the night I asked you."

"There was a moon that night," Sylvia recalled. "And the roses and honeysuckle were in bloom on the porch, and the band was playing in the City Park. You felt a perfectly natural biological impulse."

"Biology's out of my line," he growled. "I'm a physicist. But I still remember how it hurt when you told me you wouldn't marry a man you didn't love."

"Did I say that? But, my dear, I was only seventeen! Of course I used the Victorian phraseology; it was all I knew. What I meant was that I'd be damned if I'd marry the boy that father and mother and the whole town expected me to marry. . . . Oh, I felt biological too, that night. If you'd been anybody else I'd probably have thought I was in love with you; and if I had you'd still be clerking in the bank back home, and I'd be raising babies in a bungalow in the North End. But as it was——"

As it was, she was one of the best girl press agents in New York; and he was the brightest of the bright young men attached to one of the great research laboratories. So it had all turned out for the best, even if it had hurt at the time.

"As it was," she finished, "you went back to college and I went back to school; and the next time we saw each other our little flurry was over, and we've been the best of friends ever since. But lately——"

"What's the matter with lately?" he demanded.

"Not a thing," said Sylvia, reddening. "I was surprised when you first began making love to me again; I'd been afraid all those platonic years had given us a taboo. But they didn't, thank goodness. . . . Only you know, Stan, we can't go on like this." He did know it.

"But my God, Syl! I promised your mother I'd take care of you!"

"I promised your mother the same thing. But I'd much better have an affair with you than with somebody else; and you'd much better——"

"Who said anything about an affair with somebody else?"

"It has been suggested," said Sylvia obscurely. "You needn't think you're the only man who finds me attractive. I've even been asked to take part in a companionate marriage. But I despise this thing of making promises with your fingers crossed, because you're afraid of what people will say! When I get married I'll mean it. . . . But in the meantime—— Well, I'm twenty-five——"

"Oh, well!" he said furiously. "If you just want to have an affair as a matter of principle—a declaration of independence——"

"You know it isn't that! . . . Or do you?" she speculated. "I suppose you've had lots of affairs with women, haven't you, Stan?"

"Certainly," he said with dignity. She laughed in his face.

"Liar! I know better; you're always buried in your laboratory. . . . But if you keep on playing around with Sheila Kron——"

"Sheila Kron? Why, I only like to talk to her!"

"Give the girl time, Stan; you only met her last week. . . . Oh, you needn't look so sniffy; if she wants you she'll get you. You'd be perfectly helpless in the hands of a woman of her age."

"She's exactly one week older than I am!"

"Oh, that's her story, is it? Anyway, she was mar-

ried before you were out of prep school and divorced twice before you graduated from college. Since then—— Well, the less said the better."

"Now listen, if you're going to talk scandal about Sheila Kron——"

"You needn't rush to the defense of what our ancestors would have called her reputation; she'd laugh at that herself." (He knew it.) "But she'd be blue ruin for you, Stan. She's insatiable of a man's time; no more of your twenty-four-hour experiments if you tied yourself up with her. And when she's through with you she'll put you in her next book of poems, nailed on the barn door for everybody to laugh at."

He knew that, too. Picking out the men who figured in Sheila's poems was the easiest of crossword puzzles.

"So," he said, "this idea of yours was just a missionary impulse? You'd have an affair with me just to keep me away from Sheila Kron?"

"Why not? You're my best friend; I wouldn't want you to fall into the hands of the wrong kind of woman. I'd be good for you and she'd be poison. You're not in love with her, and you know I'm ten times as good-looking as she is; and I wouldn't make demands on your time, and I don't write poems—— Honestly, Stan, I think your mother would thank me if she knew. . . . Not that I'm suggesting that you tell her."

"Well, I'll be damned!" he snorted. And then Sylvia looked up, and gasped, and tried desperately to hide behind her compact.

"O Lord, there's Bull Cardigan! I told him I was working to-night."

Bull Cardigan indeed, coming down the alley between the booths, pausing at almost every one to greet somebody he knew. He filled the alley pretty thoroughly (he had been a half-back at Georgia Tech) and above his broad shoulders his wide face beamed with the well-being of the Wall Street man whose stocks have risen like rockets, while other people's holdings are going down.

"Hello, Stan. . . . Hello there, Sylvia! Got out earlier than you expected, eh? . . . No, thanks, Stan. Can't stop for a drink now. I'm going on to play poker at the Harvard Club. I took a bunch of fellows there for sixteen hundred the other night, and I've got to give them a chance to get it back." (Sixteen hundred was four months' income for Stan; and about four hours' income for Bull, on one of his good days.) "How about dinner to-morrow, Sylvia?" Bull asked amiably.

"Why, I—— I guess so," she faltered. "Stop in at the office at six; I ought to be through by then." And Bull passed on.

"Look here!" said Stan fiercely. "If you're going to have an affair with me I won't have you playing around with Bull Cardigan!"

"An affair with you? But I thought you turned me down!"

"Well, I—— We'd better think it over," he concluded weakly.

"That's what I told Bull," she said.

"Bull? Do you mean to say he's dared ask you——"

"Now listen, Stan. I like Bull——"

"Oh, you do? I hate the big gorilla!"

"Well, I like him!" said Sylvia defiantly. "In a way. . . . And he attracts me—impersonally—just the way you do. No sentiment about it. But I'm afraid of him, too. He's so tremendous and dominating; and he has a terribly crude philosophy about women. When he wants a woman he just goes and takes her."

"Oh, he does, does he? Well, if he thinks he can do that to you——"

"He says I'm different," said Sylvia reproachfully.

"You certainly are! But if you're falling for that old line——"

"Now, Stan, be fair. Bull wants to settle down —with a home at Great Neck, and two children, and three cars, and a speedboat, and a police dog. He's told me all about it. He knows I don't want to get married, but he's so ruthless and overwhelming that I'm afraid he might marry me under promise of seduction. If I had an affair with him I might lose my head and do anything. . . . That's why I'd rather it was you; because I could trust you not to—not to——"

"Not to become too interesting?" he grunted, flinging a bill at the waiter. "Huh! . . . So it's me or Bull, is it?"

"I didn't mean exactly that, but—— I like you both," said Sylvia desperately. "And if he keeps after me—— Anyway," she said, "you needn't act so

snooty about it. I know perfectly well, even if you don't, that it's me or Sheila." He stood up.

"You," he said. "And me. . . . Come on." She shrank back, startled.

"But, Stan, I didn't mean right away——"

"Oh, you didn't? Well, I did." He seized her hands, drew her up out of her seat. "Come along!"

She went with him, meekly.

II

The spring night was damp and chill. A taxi slid up to the curb; he put her into it, climbed in beside her.

"Delta Rho Club," he told the driver. She looked at him in consternation. "I've got to get a suitcase," he explained impatiently, "before we can get into a hotel."

"Not a hotel, Stan! It seems so common. . . . Besides, somebody we know might see us."

"Well, I can't take you to my club, and you can't take me to yours."

That exhausted the possibilities, if she wouldn't consider a hotel. He felt an amazing relief.

"I moved yesterday," said Sylvia. (He thought damn.) "Marigold Palmer went to France and left me her apartment on Ninth Street. You've been there, haven't you? Remember that lovely view over the gardens between Ninth and Tenth? . . . But I don't know," she said. "People we know might see you come in——"

He felt reprieved. . . . But if they didn't see him come in to-night, they might see Bull Cardigan to-morrow night. . . . He gave new directions to the driver, and settled back on the seat, as far from her as possible.

He knew he ought to be wildly happy. The woman who was about to yield to him was the woman he most desired, the woman who was his best friend. . . . But she was Sylvia—Sylvia whom he'd promised to take care of in New York. Of course he'd take care of her; he was saving her from Bull Cardigan. But he couldn't help feeling that she was an appalling responsibility. . . . Sheila Kron, now—— An affair with her entailed no responsibility; it was only part of the routine of seeing New York.

Their hands tingled to the touch as he helped her out, but neither spoke till they were going up the stairs.

"I do hope we can get in," said Sylvia.

"Why couldn't we?" he asked with a flicker of reviving hope.

"Marigold has a morbid fear of burglars. She had a big trick lock put on the door, and the key doesn't always work. Once last month, when Bull and I brought Marigold home from a party, he had to get out on the fire escape—it's on the hallway, in this house—and climb over to the window so he could unlock the door from inside."

"Well, maybe we'll have better luck," said Stan dubiously.

But they didn't. No matter how they twisted the

key and turned it and rattled the lock, nothing happened. In the unlighted corridor they looked at each other helplessly.

"Where's this fire escape?" he asked with grim resignation.

"Right outside that window, at the end of the hall. . . . But don't try it, Stan! It's four feet across to the bathroom window, and that's too narrow for you to climb in. You have to swing from it to the sill of the living-room window. You could never make it. . . . No, you'll have to take me back to the club; they'll put me up. And then we can—think this all over."

He regarded that prospect as the shipwrecked mariner regards the smoke of the passing steamer, disappearing beyond the horizon.

"Oh, I can't do it, can't I? Bull Cardigan did it."

"But, darling, that's his stuff!" (She hadn't called him darling for years; she must be creating atmosphere, he reflected morosely.) "Please, Stan! You're a scientist, not an athlete. It—it doesn't matter."

Her trembling hand clutched his arm, but he shook it off.

"Oh, doesn't it?" he growled. Bull had a dinner date with her to-morrow night; and Bull could get in that window— "I just unlatch the door," Stan asked, "after I'm inside?"

She nodded; without a word she followed him to the fire-escape window; her pale anxious face peered after him as he climbed out.

His legs wound round the fire-escape railing; he

looked for the bathroom window. Four feet? It looked like forty. Beyond that, and a little lower, the sill of the living-room window that his groping foot must reach; and a four-story drop to a paved areaway below. . . . But Bull Cardigan had done it, and might do it again. . . . Stan leaned out as far as he dared, and lunged forward. His hands caught the bathroom window sill; hanging from that he swung his legs through the air, trying for a footing at the other window—and missed.

He wondered why the jerk hadn't torn his hands away from the bathroom window sill; but they were hanging on for dear life. You didn't appreciate that phrase when you read it in an armchair. . . . He looked up. Sylvia's frightened face stared from the fire escape like a pallid flower blooming in the night. . . . That line was from one of Sheila's poems. Sheila would never get a man into a jam like this. . . . He looked back at Sylvia. Why didn't she call for help? Of course—she was afraid somebody she knew would discover them. Damn her, she'd let him die for fear of what people would say! And she called herself emancipated. . . . Sheila, now, wouldn't care what people would say; everything had been said about her already——

With a tremendous effort he swung his legs again —and this time his foot caught something. He looked; the blessed window sill. One more swing, a slithering lurch of his body along the blank brick wall, and his hands clutched the framework of the living-room window. He let himself down cautiously—thank God

the window was open—and a moment later his feet were planted on the firm, the broad, the immovable floor. He wondered why he had never appreciated floors till now. A man stands on them all the time and never thinks about them, till he stands on nothing. . . .

He fumbled for the light switch, turned it on, and unlatched the door. Sylvia stumbled in and fell in a heap in the nearest chair, staring up at him in silence. But Stan was moved to speech.

"Well!" he said. "You're in—and I'm out. You make me sick! I hope I'll never see you again!" Her eyes opened wider, but still she was silent. "You've made a fool of me long enough!" he cried. "You know damn well I'm in love with you—yes, in love the way our ancestors meant it! I'm crazy about you; I always have been. That time I asked you to marry me, back home, you turned me down so hard that I was afraid to say anything more about it; but lately I've been hoping—— Well, never mind that. I know better now. . . . You wanted an affair—but not with Bull Cardigan. You're afraid of him. You wanted somebody you didn't care anything about, somebody you could throw over whenever you got tired. Well, I won't play Madame Butterfly to your B. F. Pinkerton!"

Her hand moved weakly; she was trying to answer him.

"But you can't live up to your own principles!" he jeered. "You nearly broke my neck to-night because you didn't want to go to a hotel. People might see

you! People might talk! Huh! Fine free woman you are! . . . Go on—have your affair with Bull! He'll dominate you; he'll sweep you off your feet; the first thing you know you'll be Mrs. Robert Toombs Cardigan, with two children and three cars and a speedboat and a police dog. And it will serve you right!"

The door slammed behind him; she heard his feet pounding down the stairs. And still she could not stir.

III

Morose and hollow-eyed, he came to the laboratory next morning. Here and here only he felt at home, in an austere atmosphere where men measured in millionths of a millimeter, and thought about quanta and wavé lengths, not about women. Among coils and condensers, electric circuits and vacuum tubes, you knew where you were. If you did thus and so, such and such would infallibly happen. No surprises, no humiliating disappointments, no appallingly persistent aches. . . .

For eight hours he watched a spot of light reflected from a mirror move across a ground-glass scale, timing it, and starting it over again, and timing it once more. Eight solid hours of that, without thought of food or drink, or Sylvia. When he had finished he spent three hours more plotting the curve of his results, with the help of the most recondite mathematics. And when he had done that, when the results of his experiment lay plain before him, he sat and stared.

He had unsettled some of the surest foundations of human knowledge; he had proved that the world's greatest physicists were wrong.

But maybe he was wrong. He might have made a mistake in his figures; and he'd been having trouble all day with the harmonics in the high-frequency alternating currents. . . . Yesterday, he would have been sure that the world's greatest physicists were wrong; but he hadn't discovered, then, how wrong he could be when he had a chance. He was nobody to unsettle the foundations of human knowledge—he who couldn't even unsettle the self-centered callousness of the girl who was dining, to-night, with Bull Cardigan.

He was tired and hungry, his head ached, he wanted a beefsteak and a baked potato. But when they lay before him, at the restaurant around the corner, he couldn't eat them. He swallowed a cup of coffee, but his head ached still. He wanted—— No, he didn't want Sylvia; he was through with her. He wanted a drink, he wanted a noisy crowd—people who talked and laughed, people who didn't matter.

They wouldn't be hard to find. Vic and Mary Salter were throwing a party to-night at their studio on Tenth Street; half the people he knew would be there. Sylvia and Bull Cardigan might drop in after dinner—— No, they wouldn't; not to-night. . . . He didn't care. He never wanted to see her again.

But Sheila Kron would be there, certainly.

IV

Sheila was the first who greeted him. (It was one of those parties where half the guests never see the host and hostess at all.) She had just collected two drinks from the kitchen, and she gave him one of them. On his empty stomach it had instant effect, powerful and gratifying; he looked down thankfully at her flat-nosed face, her colorless hair, her washed-out eyes that mutely admitted that she knew just how homely she was. Men always began by feeling sorry for her.

"And they call this fun!" she said, looking at the chattering crowd. "This smoke makes my eyes smart. Let's get out of it; we can talk on the fire escape."

He helped her through the window; they leaned against the railing in the cool spring night. Below them, gardens filled the whole interior of the block; in the light from the studio windows the back walls of apartment houses took shape beyond the shrubbery —houses that fronted on the other street. He had just realized that the other street was Ninth Street when Sheila began to talk.

"The trouble about parties like this," she said, "is that somebody always ends up at Port Chester."

"Port Chester? What's that?"

"It's a town up the Sound where you can get marriage licenses in the middle of the night. Many a boy or girl has got stewed at a party, and gone to Port Chester in a coma, and waked up next morning in

the Pickwick Arms at Greenwich with a wife or husband they'd never seen till the evening before. . . . That happened to me when I was sixteen."

"Poor kid!" he muttered, and slipped an arm about her shoulders. He felt that he was beginning to understand her; she'd had a pretty tough break, on the whole.

"And the strange thing about it, Stan, is that I tried to make that crazy marriage work. I didn't get much cooperation, but I tried. . . . Oh, I know I'm more or less of a joke around town now, but I was full of good intentions when I was sixteen. Everything might have been different if that first man had been the right sort." He stroked her shoulder sympathetically. "It's funny," she said, "for me to be telling you all this, isn't it?"

"Not a bit," he protested.

Yesterday that would have meant, "I suppose you tell everybody." Now he could only muse on the strange sweet fatality that had drawn them together —two bits of driftwood——

"I don't suppose you can understand a woman like me," she said. "You're so aloof and austere. But if you understood how just knowing you has helped me——" He stirred suddenly. She waited for him to ask her how just knowing him had helped her, till she perceived that he was looking at something over her head. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"A burglar! One of those houses across the gardens. . . . Look—there he is, on the fire escape."

She turned and looked, and laughed.

"He's going out, not coming in. Probably somebody's husband came home too soon."

Stan's eyes were used to the dusk, now. He saw a man straddling the railing of a fire escape—a man with wide bulky shoulders. . . . Bull Cardigan. Sylvia had locked herself out again.

"Look!" Sheila gasped. "Oh! He'll break his neck!"

"I hope he does," Stan muttered.

But he didn't. Powerful and agile as a gorilla, he swarmed from the fire escape to the bathroom window, from bathroom window to living-room window, in one quick movement. They saw the light go on; they saw Bull Cardigan pull down the shade, clear to the sill.

Sheila turned to speak to Stan, but Stan had gone.

V

He ran frantically, recklessly, down the narrow iron steps of the fire escape; from the ladder at the bottom he dropped on the pavement of the area; across the gardens he plunged, panting, sobbing. A high board fence blocked him; he leaped, caught the top of it, pulled himself up and swung over. The barbed wire on the top slashed his hands open, but he never knew it. He had forgotten everything except that he was going to throw Bull Cardigan out of Sylvia's apartment, with his own hands.

The ladder of the other fire escape—Sylvia's fire

escape—hung above him, beyond his upraised arms. He leaped, caught the lowest rung, hauled himself up. He ran up the narrow iron stairs, counting the floors; the fourth was Sylvia's. He straddled the railing, leaned toward the bathroom window; driven by red fury, he lunged and caught it; as easily as Bull Cardigan, he swung himself over to the other window. He let himself down and in, under the lowered shade.

With a rattle and bang it flew up. Sylvia, standing listless by the table, whirled about and stared at him. She was alone.

"Where's Bull?" he panted, the frenzy of battle still on him.

"Bull? He went home."

"Why did he go home?" Stan felt cheated of the chance to throw him out.

"I sent him home," said Sylvia. "As soon as he let me in. He—— He didn't want to go. But he went."

They stood for an instant, staring; then they moved forward, drawn by an irresistible force. His arms enfolded her; she drew his face down to hers. . . . At last he stood back, staring into her eyes.

"Sylvia! You said you wouldn't have an affair with a man who was crazy about you. . . . But you're going to."

"I said I wouldn't, unless——" She laughed hysterically. "Unless I was crazy about him too."

"What? You—you don't mean you're in love with me? The way our ancestors meant it?"

"God pity my ancestors," she said, "if any of them

ever felt what I felt last night, when you hung by your fingers from the window sill. . . . Darling, I've always been crazy about you; but I didn't know it till I saw you hanging there and knew it was my fault. Then something hit me—the way the hurricane hit Florida. I tried to scream for help, but I couldn't make a sound, I couldn't stir. Afterward, when you were bawling me out—and how I deserved it!—I still couldn't say a word. And when you walked out on me I wished I could die——"

His arms released her; she drew back, hurt and bewildered.

"Put on your hat," he commanded. "We're going to Port Chester."

"Port Chester? Where's that?"

"We'll ask a taxi driver. . . . It's a place where you can get a marriage license in the middle of the night."

"But you don't want to get married! Your laboratory——"

"I do want to get married, to you. I know you don't, but try and get out of it."

"No danger," said Sylvia blithely. "All day long I've been cursing myself because I didn't say yes that time you asked me back home—even if it would have meant a bungalow in the North End."

VI

From the fire escape across the garden, Sheila saw all that happened in the room where the window shade had flown up, and had never been pulled down. She

watched till Sylvia put on her hat and opened the door, till Stan turned out the light. Then, facing about with a sigh, she saw a young man's head and shoulders protruding from the open window behind her.

"Where's Stan?" he demanded.

"God knows," said Sheila cheerlessly.

"I wanted to see him. I thought he was out here with you."

"Well, you can see he isn't. . . . Help me in, Charlie."

She leaned on his shoulder as she came through the window; his arm about her waist steadied her as she leaped down to the studio floor.

"Thanks, Charlie dear. Now perhaps you'll bring me a drink, and we can settle down to one of our old-time talks."

"I'll bring you a drink," Charlie promised, with a preoccupied frown. "But I wish I could find out where Stan went——"

Sheila heaved a sigh of resignation.

"If to-morrow morning will do," she said, "you might call him up at the Pickwick Arms at Greenwich."

THE END

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